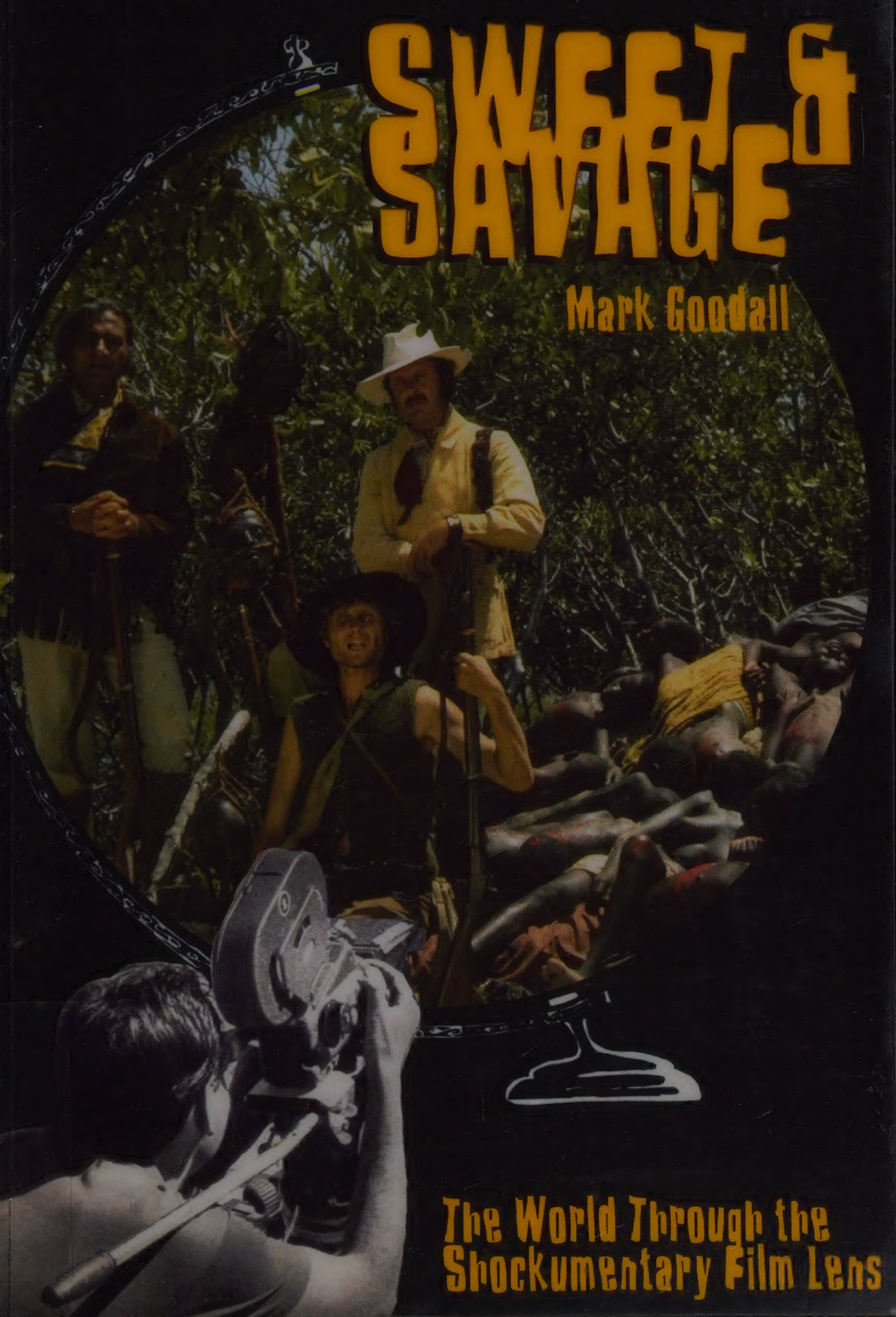
SWEET & SAVAGE

Mark Goodall



The World Through the Shockumentary Film Lens

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A HEADPRESS BOOK
Published in 2006

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2a Abbot Street
London
E8 3DP
Great Britain

[tel] 0845 330 1844
[email] office@headpress.com
[web] www.headpress.com

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SWEET & SAVAGE
The World Through The Shockumentary Film Lens

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Cover: Images from *Mondo Cane* and *Addio Zio Tom* Frontispiece: *Taboos of the World*

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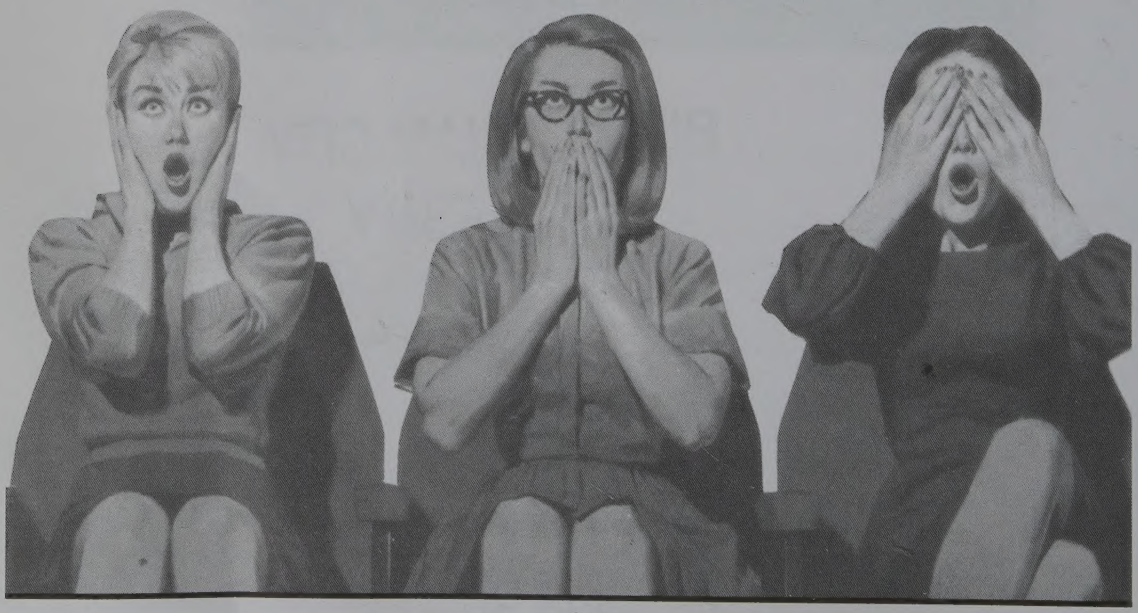
British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 1-900486-49-0



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Acknowledgements

THIS BOOK is dedicated to Luca Dicandeloro and Gualtiero Jacopetti, two individuals whose contributions were essential to its realisation.

Luca Dicandeloro has been involved in almost every aspect of the book as well as the projects predating it. His tireless efforts and gentle drive to get what is required are typical of a great, creative individual. The project is many, many times richer for Luca's involvement and commitment.

Gualtiero Jacopetti has always assisted with information, with histories and with company; all with the impeccable courtesy one would expect from a great European cine-journalist and *auteur*. This book only begins to tell the story of his incredible films.

Special thanks also go to Giampaolo Lomi who guards the "*vecchio leone*" but has always helped out with humour and with passion.

The following friends also helped significantly, professionally and without complaint: J.G. Ballard (a great writer who responded quickly and beautifully); James Battle; Daniel Becker; Marc Cavazza, Jeremy Dyson (a true polymath); David Kerekes (who as well as supporting the project all along is a rarity amongst publishers — a nice guy); Davide Morena; Stanis Nievo; Alfonso Orsi; Riz Ortolani and Katyna Ranieri; Franco Prosperi; Thierry Zéno. John and Leila Thorpe translated vital material and helped introduce the films to Italians and non-Italians alike, who may have forgotten. Oliver Trenouth did some fine technical stuff. Bill Lawrence and Tony Earnshaw always make my crazy ideas material.

Patrick Eyres and Wendy Frith have always, often against their better judgements and tastes, supported my work and will be relieved to see it finally in print. Now I can get back to Carlos...

Finally, Marie Byatt provided support and encouragement and love — as always.

Foreword

by Jeremy Dyson

IT ALL SEEMS so long ago. A breathless half hour walk through the back streets of Leicester to an out of the way petrol station. A much longer walk back, weighed down as we were with a primitive, eighteen-kilogram VHS recorder and a pile of videotapes. This was 1981 and video recorders were still a novelty. My friend Andy Nyman did not possess one. But there was an enterprising garage cum corner shop that would hire out machines for those who were not early adopters, together with a pile of pirated tapes. And this was before the stringencies of the Video Recording Act had come into force, so a whole world of obscenity and ultra-violence opened itself up to us. We were fifteen and for some reason we wanted to test ourselves, see how much we could take. This was the golden age of the Video Nasty and we were in heaven.

We sought the thrill of the forbidden. Not pornography, although the stuff we watched was akin to it in a way. It provided a sharp thrill, a jolt, a shock. There was an electric pleasure in testing our limits, provoking a visceral response. These were Italian horror movies — directed by the likes of Lucio Fulci, Umberto Lenzi and Ruggero Deodato. They contained ghoulish acts of bloodshed depicted in stomach-churning detail — beheadings, gougings, eviscerations and the like. Their titles had already written themselves into a kind of mythology:

"Have you seen *House by the Cemetery*?"

"No."

"Oh you've got to see it. A girl sicks up her own intestines."

"What about *Cannibal Ferox*? They make a man eat his own eyes."

A few years later, long after these films were banned, the mythology had grown into a cult of the taboo. The movies were discussed with a reverence and in semi-academic terms in specialist magazines such as *Shock Xpress* and *Eyeball: the European Sex and Horror Review*. Mingled amongst the lurid examples that were familiar were other even more mysterious and exotic titles, including one that recurred frequently: *Mondo Cane*.

I assumed at first that it referred to a character — pronounced 'Kane', as in *Citizen Kane* by Orson Welles. 'Mondo' seemed redolent of 'Mongo', the brutish half-wit in *Blazing Saddles*. Consequently I created a vivid image of a lumpen, feral giant pulling people to pieces. Later I discovered

these films — for there was a series of them — were something else entirely. A kind of shock documentary with weird and bizarre things recorded all around the world, a Latinate 'Ripley's Believe it or not' with a nihilistic twist. I still had yet to see one when we recorded the first series of *The League of Gentlemen*. In this the character of Tubbs is seen briefly suckling a piglet. I was shocked, not long after the program was transmitted, to finally see *Mondo Cane* and discover that it contained exactly the same image — Tubbs being replaced by an African Tribeswoman. Life truly is stranger than fiction. But then that is the point of the Mondo film.

For the uninitiated, or for the fan, I cannot think of a better, more erudite guide than my old friend Mark Goodall. He has devoted the better part of the last decade to researching this fascinating and bizarre subject and here are the fruits of his labours. So turn the page and find out why it truly is a world of dogs.

Jeremy Dyson
London, April 2005

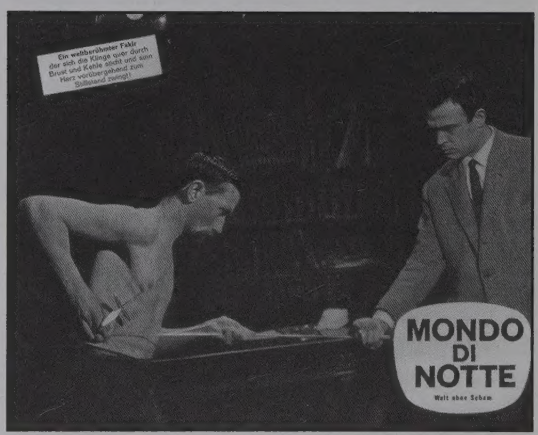
Jeremy Dyson is a writer of television and film comedy and drama. He is a co-writer of BBC comedy series *The League of Gentlemen* and is also the author of *The Essex Files*, *Never Trust a Rabbit*, *Bright Darkness: the lost art of the supernatural film* and *Still*.

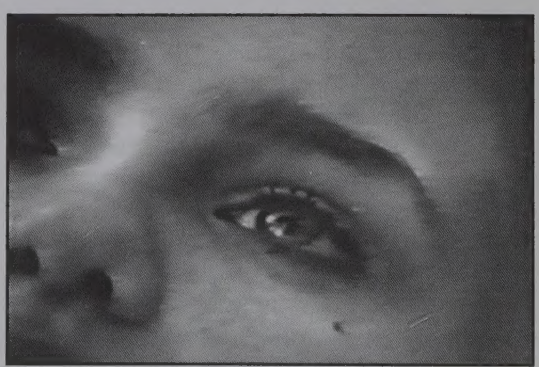
Introduction

autopsia: the act of seeing with one's own eyes

There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy
Hamlet

All the scenes you will see in this film are true and are taken only from life. If often they are shocking, it is because there are many shocking things in this world
Mondo Cane





Mondo di notte* and *Svezia, Inferno e Paradiso

TRACES of the mondo film, one of the most controversial and overlooked genres in cinematic history can be found in a bewildering array of contemporary mass media products. The cable and satellite TV shows depicting 'the world's worst'; the voyeurism and surveillance of Reality TV; the anti-narrative fictions of J G Ballard and Patrick McCabe; the wordless melancholy of Godfrey Reggio and Ron Fricke's 'cinema of looking'; the ironic mockery of *Eurotrash*; the infantile sick-making of *Bizarre* magazine; the global photo-imaging of *National Geographic*, which still promotes a voyeuristic agenda and New Internationalist which promotes a social one. Benetton's *Colors* magazine is a mondo film in print form. Meanwhile most contemporary news reportage owe in part their aesthetic

and political form to the films made in the late twentieth century whose radical take on the documentary film became known as mondo. The story of this cinematic genre is a story that has remained buried and forgotten. The most extensive search for traces of mondo history will uncover only the sparsest of nebulous details centred around predictable examples from which the imagination of what mondo means has been shaped (in his innovative book, *The Incredible Film Show*, Jonathan Ross dismisses mondo as a "short-lived craze"). Common opinion states that the mondo film began at the inception of cinema, in fact as soon as film cameras were pointed at things, and there are photographic examples of pre-mondo activity dating back even further. But the mondo film truthfully began in the early 1960s when an Italian film based on a Tuscan colloquial expression called *Mondo Cane* directed by Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi and Paolo Cavara was released. The trail of mondo films begins properly with this film because it is beautifully crafted, mesmerizing and unique; there had been nothing like it before. But the genre of mondo, what one reviewer called "the Jacopetti school", has got uglier, nastier and more derivative right up to the arrival of the 'compilation tape' (an underground homemade collection of unpleasant film and video images) by way of gory natural inquiry films and the infamous and banned *Faces of Death* franchise. Largely because of this conception of morbidity the reaction to mondo films has been thus fixed: most individuals that engage with the films sense vulgarity, shock, violence, and dishonesty as the most immediate traits. Others feel this too, but are also mesmerised — the impact on seeing the films is permanent, addictive, and irresistible. The powerful jolt reaction experienced by the mondo devotee is arguably deeper than the shock or disgust provoked by the contemporary horror film in that the 'horrors' presented in mondo films are, if not always steeped in *vérité*, mimetic representations of a form of real lived experience (as opposed to the *hyper-reality* of modern horror). The art of the mondo film is thus elusive but thrilling and this book tries to illustrate some of the secrets of this aesthetic and emotional tornado while attempting to bring some cohesion and rational examination to a history of the art of the mondo film. It is not an attempt at chronicling every filmic or televisual example of mondo activity. There is already a body of obsessive lists of mondo films (including those submitted by *Psychotronic Video* magazine in 1989, and those available on the web sites *The Internet Mondo Movie Database* and *So Sweet So Perverse* which all gamely try and decode the infuriating multiple titles for most mondo films). It is rather an attempt at defining, through focus on those films most 'significant' to the genre, the magical power of the mondo aesthetic. Kerekes and Slater's monumental study *Killing for Culture: death in film from mondo to snuff* vividly exorcised the most unpleasant aspects of the mondo film, extrapolating the death aesthetic of the extreme mondo's to that of the snuff movie and beyond. Their book places the mondo film into a meaningful and worrying context (as does Joel Black's more recent essay on real(ist) horror where a similar link between the death film and mondo is made). But this is only one, albeit fascinating, context. So the intention of this book is to complement rather than challenge such theses and to focus on some of the key films in more analytical detail than previous authors have been able to do. The book will encourage three notions:

that mondo films are a powerful and important aspect of film history;

that much of today's media output owe a debt to the aesthetics and politics of the mondo film;

that mondo films belong to the 'high' genres of documentary and the practices of the avant-garde as much as they do to exploitation, trash and shock cinema.

The intentions of the creators of the most exceptional mondo films were entirely serious and artful and should be respected as such (see Jacopetti's *Considerations on the Documentary Film*). Such films were often not conceived to 'exploit' audiences — although many mondo films later did this; they were not made to 'break the taboos' of societies or to agitate for any meaningful socio-cultural or political change, but some did this too; they were not intended to be pornographic, although many exhibited and encouraged voyeuristic tendencies. These films were created as cinematic, poetic and useful commentaries on human behaviour in some of its wildest and weirdest formations. The supreme mondos were, unlike many of their offspring, created with great skill and craft supported by not insignificant budgetary foundations. The most noteworthy mondo films were films that certainly changed forever the way the world was viewed and reported on through a lens. Mondo was a global phenomenon: there were examples from France (Claude LeLouch's *La Femme Spectacle* (*Paris in the Raw*), Germany (Manfred Durniok's *Welt Ohne Scham* (*Mondo Bizarre*), Scandinavia (*Naked North*) and the USA (*Mondo Mod*). Even Britain enjoyed a mini mondo flurry: Norman Cohen's *The London Nobody Knows*, Edward Stuart Abraham's *Our Incredible World*, and Arnold Louis Miller's *Primitive London/London in the Raw* all offered shockumentary thrills to Europe's staidest audience. The universal scope of the mondo film, through its form, content and prefix envisaged the global village to come. This book is about the way these films were made and the way in which audiences and critics have received them.

It is notable that most of the texts on mondo films so far have emphasised the works as misanthropic, cynical or negative representations of twentieth century global cultures. Indeed *Mondo Cane* begins (in a publicity statement for the film) with the remark that "of all living creatures man is the only one born crying". This mournful observation crystallises the ideological 'readings' that are etched into the formless history of mondo so far. Yet if we read on to the end of the same proposal we find that "though this is a world which has gone to the dogs, it is also a world in which we are happy to live" — hence the mondo paradox writ large from the outset. This type of conceptual contradiction has arguably done a disservice to the critical record of the genre over the years and yet it is these very contradictions that make mondo films so fascinating and prescient.

Mondo and Documentary

In his recent *Introduction to Documentary* Bill Nichols defines mondo films' relationship with documentary as that of being a "cabaret of curiosities (which) is often an embarrassing fellow-traveller more than a central element". In this he does not deviate from the received wisdom that in the documentary tradition mondo films are at best *pseudo*-documentary films, at worst sensations contrary to all that is known as actuality (that is if the films are mentioned at all). Even Peter Bondanella's exhaustive study, *Italian Cinema*, makes only cursory reference to the mondo genre (despite mondo being an Italian invention). Kim Newman's history of Italian exploitation film, *Thirty Years in Another Town*, at least acknowledges this: that the mondo genre, part of the Italian trend for what Paul Rotha called "neo-exoticism", was an original and authentic movement in a post-war Italian film industry dominated otherwise by an avalanche of Anglo-Saxon counterfeits. There are clear stylistic and ideological reasons as to why mondo films have been kept out of documentary film history and the 'distancing' effect engendered by this response is relevant to an understanding of how and why mondo films have been so wilfully ignored. Firstly, the trend in documentary film in the 1960s (especially in the UK/US) was for 'observational' or 'participatory' documentary film modes,

the former constructed film documents out of blank record; the latter utilised interview and interaction between filmmaker and subject and use of archive and testimony. Clearly and immediately mondo films transgress these 'cardinal rules' offering a perversion of these modes. The 'participatory' mode crucially assumes an 'anthropological' approach to the presentation of 'real' events. This sociological and academic approach leads the viewer to expect to "witness the historical world as represented by someone who actively engages with, rather than unobtrusively observes, poetically reconfigures, or argumentatively assembles the world" (Bill Nichols). Although the mid-late mondo films of Angelo and Alfredo Castiglioni were constructed with the filmmakers participation in the cultures of the film, resulting in a "scientific approach", many examples of mondo film ignore the notion of empirical delivery, if not through the distance created by the edit process (where time/space/geography is collapsed) than by that most powerful and essential of mondo 'tools' the voice-over. Notwithstanding the patronising tone of many voice-overs the numerous attempts at convincing the viewer that the camera crew had been engaging intimately with the people they were capturing on film are often negated by the proliferation of 'secret' filming using 'hidden cameras', a peep-show mode of recording. Mondo films further eschew participatory notions such as the notion of the filmmaker as a "social actor" or as leaving a "bodily presence" (Bill Nichols) with their insistence on aerial shots (the helicopter is a favourite methodology) and by use of acquired footage from outside sources. Similarly the notion of *observational* filmmaking was subverted in mondo films (despite the ironic fact that the tools of the observational documentary film — lightweight Arriflex cameras, for example, were critical in the development of mondo films). In a review of *Mondo Cane* the British *Monthly Film Bulletin's* damning critique of the film was topped by the argument that if the film had been made instead by Jean Rouch (French exponent of the documentary film) it would have been a lot better, and more truthful. This and other reviews simply reflect the trend of film criticism of the time for an engagement with authenticity, realism and fidelity in documentary practice. Thus in ways in which we shall discover, and despite fulfilling Michael Renov's notion of documentary as "a discourse...of delirium", the mondo film continues to have a problematic, if inextricable, relationship with the notion of the documentary film.

Mondo and exploitation

It is noticeable how most of the meagre entries for mondo films in film indexes are indifferent to the genre, describing the style and approach of the mondo film as either "repellent" (*The Oxford Companion to Film*), "lurid" (*The Macmillan International Film Encyclopaedia*), "emetic and glib" (*Halliwell's Film Guide*). The conceptualisation of mondo films as exploitation films has been well established and is still the realm within which they are most frequently located (particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries). The engagement with mondo films in the underground press has emphasised the 'shock' value of the films, as these are the values most coherent with the ideologies of the various 'paracinematic' publishing exercises. Such fanzines tendency to present a sensationalist angle on the mondo aesthetic reflects the desire for such magazines to celebrate the transgressive, the weird and the taboo. Bill Landis' *Sleazoid Express* has, for example, published a tabloid-style account of the work of Jacopetti and Prosperi in both magazine and book form; the Italian horror fanzines *Nocturno* and *Amarcord* have published articles devoted to the gore elements in mondo films (again linking mondo with snuff movies). One publication, Charles Kilgore's *Ecco*, is structured around the 'cinema of attractions' and Kilgore's love of mondo movies defines the ideology of the magazine. However it is perhaps not

surprising that American engagement with mondo films is largely devoted to the field of exploitation; this after all is the place where the notion of film as a spectacle and commercial tool has been refined most successfully. American producers were some of the quickest to capitalize on the success of *Mondo Cane* and are mostly responsible for creating the genre as an exploitation strand. Perhaps the most grotesque example of this was producer Jerry Gross's re-launch of Jacopetti and Prosperi's *Africa Addio* as *Africa Blood and Guts* where the techniques of exploitation reached new heights (or lows).

Mondo and art film

> ***A closer examination of the mondo film reveals a cultural critique of otherness in its appropriation and exploitation of western concepts of primitivism, modernism, authenticity, representation, gender, class, race and identity. The mondo film extracts, shuffles and reinserts others back in to the mainstream of western popular culture and imagination. Unconcerned with holism, context, and authenticity (the mondo film) relies on fragmentation, jump-cuts, decontextualisation and fakery to create its product***
> *Amy J. Staples*

So mondo films are avant-garde? Links have been made already between mondo in general, and *Mondo Cane* in particular, as expressions of experimental art cinema. Perhaps rightly so, as to examine the identity and ideology of the 'avant-garde film' is to enter a cinematic arena where shock, confusion, sensory assault, contrast/juxtaposition, sex and violence are plentiful. In an interview with Nico Panigutti, Jacopetti even defined in his own words the importance of the confrontational edit process (the "shock cut") to the language of the mondo film. Such 'shock cuts' appear regularly and most spectacularly in the films of Jacopetti and Prosperi and were applied in subsequent mondo films. A use of montage to create traumatic and critical meanings worthy of Eisenstein. Similarly the avant-garde technique of deconstruction is critical in the mondo aesthetic, where extensive use of freeze-frames, rapid zooms, and extreme close-ups drive the energy and breathlessness of the films (much to the abhorrence, as noted above, of documentary advocates). The more recent development of the 'compilation tape' (*AMOK Sensory Assault* and others) — a collage of disparate footage — can be seen as the result of the cut and paste methodology afforded by cheap VCR copying devices and clearly, if brutally, reworks mondo stylistics. It is this reflexive quality of the mondo film that creates the most transgressive moments which when refracted through a post-modern aesthetic continues to shock and surprise.

The most notable films of the avant-garde to be associated with *Mondo Cane* have been Georges Franju's *La Sange des Bêtes* (*Blood of the Beasts*) and Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*. Brakhage made his infamous autopsy film based on the doctrine of seeing, taken directly from the origins of the meaning of the word 'autopsis' ("an eyewitness observation", "any critical analysis"). Although Brakhage directly avoided loading his film with metaphor (despite earlier planning to weave other shots between the autopsy scenes) this definition of the word and action clearly lives on in the mondo aesthetic. Brakhage's "drive towards the creation of an aesthetic", through a desire to "keep it clean, go spare, go clear", is echoed in Jacopetti's conception of the "total film". Franju meanwhile conceived his abattoir film as a revealing of truth through the camera lens where even shocking images, "the heart of the atrocious", must not spare the viewer in an attack on societal hypocrisy. In construction the film prefigures mondo aesthetics, not just in its nightmarish, disturbing imagery and use of the amoral metaphor, but also in the way that Franju employs a light, popular song of the time (Charles Trenet's *La Mer*) as a jolting effect (critic Raymond

Durgnat called this "nihilistic anarchism" and labelled both Franju and Jacopetti "poet-tourists").

So, mondo films engage with the notion of the avant-garde through the construction of the filmic image-sound. But they also engage with the notion of the avant-garde via a critique of the practices of high art. One of the most famous scenes from *Mondo Cane* involves a mocking representation of the French artist Yves Klein. In *Mondo Cane No.2* a Greek avant-garde artist with a technique of paintings consisting of vomited-up pigments is also mocked. The film ends with a further parody of performance art: in a concert where the tune is rendered via slaps across the performers faces. Vale and Juno have argued that 'incredibly strange films' (which they have indicated includes mondo film) can be subversive and 'critical' in the way that is expected of most avant-garde filmmaking processes: "(Incredibly Strange Films) often present unpopular — even radical — views addressing social, political, racial or sexual inequalities, hypocrisy in religion or government; or in other ways they assault taboos related to the presentation of sexuality, violence and other mores". British author J G Ballard was so enthralled by mondo films that he dedicated his novel *The Atrocity Exhibition* to the aesthetics and politics of mondo ("radical declensions of violence"); the notion of violent media as pleasurable entertainment is the key to the book. The situating of Godfrey Reggio's *qatsi* trilogy into an avant-garde context resonates with the mondo film too — both in the sense of filmic scenarios and the language of film aiding a spiritual awareness — a journey, but also with the presentation of the shock of the real (the first film of the trilogy *Koyaanisqatsi* has been labelled a 'modern-day mondo film'). Finally, questions of 'authorship' informing discussions of the filmmaker as a unique creator of a work of art, likening experimental filmmakers to the creators of books or paintings, are significant in any discussion of film as art. The presence of Jacopetti as producer, editor, director emphasising his role as an 'author' (an *auteur*) is an image that Jacopetti has cultivated somewhat over the years.

Such considerations will inform the examination of mondo films in this book and try to aid a better understanding of mondo filmmaking and its nebulous influence. To this end the text on the films is book-ended with two important pieces. The first is an interview with the author J G Ballard exploring his fascination with mondo films. The second is the reproduction of an essay, never before published, written by Gualtiero Jacopetti outlining his personal and polemical approach to documentary filmmaking.

The goal of this book is to agitate for a greater appreciation of the mondo aesthetic and of certain mondo films in particular. It is likely, however, that advocates of documentary filmmaking will remain still resistant to the mondo genre; that the avant-garde remain distant to it and that fans of "sleazy mindless movies" have already moved on to 'better/worse' audiovisual entertainment. To paraphrase *Mondo Cane* this book 'will not make judgements or pretend to moralize'. As always it will be the reader, and the viewer, that will decide.

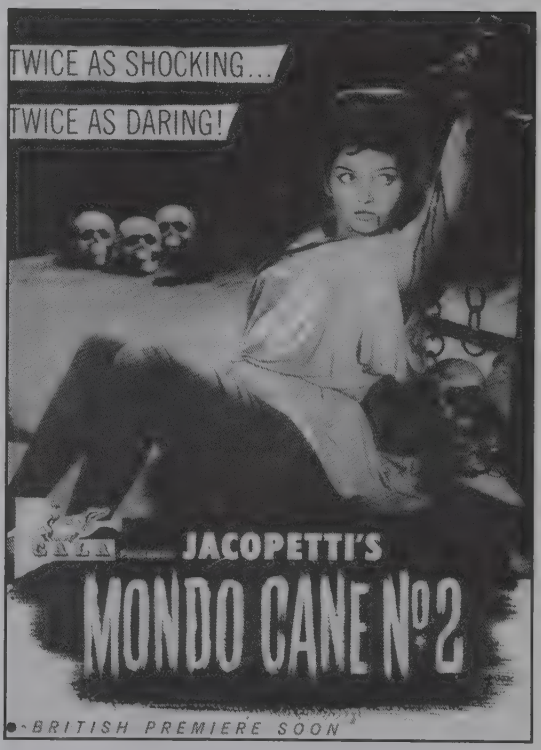
As I write, the provocative Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier plans to reopen the wounds of American slavery, thirty years on from *Zio Tom*, with *Manderlay*. In Zimbabwe the process of black Africans, driven by a distorted ideology, are violently reclaiming land from white 'settlers'. Jacopetti showed such acts over forty years ago. Meanwhile in the Darfur region of the Sudan, rape, torture, ethnic cleansing and genocide are being carried out for revenge and for punishment, a hideous scenario that has been dubbed the 'new Rwanda'. But the 'old' Rwanda we have already seen, in *Africa Addio*, and the awful legacy of these and other shockumentary film images, and our failure to act on them, haunts us still.

An Exhibition of Atrocities

J G Ballard on mondo films

Interview by Mark Goodall

I fear that you will never persuade the Americans to like Jacopetti – they hate moral ambiguity and their black and white Protestantism clashes head on into the Catholic relativism built into every frame of the Mondo Cane films
J G Ballard



J G BALLARD I was a great admirer of *Mondo Cane* and the two sequels, though if I remember they became more and more faked, though that was part of their charm. We, the 1960s audiences, needed the real and authentic (executions, flagellant's processions, autopsies etc.) and it didn't matter if they were faked — a more or less convincing simulation of the real was enough and even preferred. Also, the more tacky and obviously exploitative style appealed to an audience just waiting to be corrupted — the Vietnam newsreels on TV were authentically real, but that wasn't 'real' enough. Jacopetti filled an important gap in all sorts of ways — game playing was coming in. Also they were quite stylistically made and featured good photography, unlike some of the ghastly compilation atrocity footage I've been sent. It is lovely to think that he had his retrospective in a British university

(as in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which is *not* set in the US, as some think). [*See end note*]

I think that Jacopetti was genuinely important, and opened a door into what some call postmodernism and I call boredom. Screen the JFK assassination enough times and the audience will laugh.

MARK GOODALL What were your initial impressions of the films of Gualtiero Jacopetti (*Mondo Cane*, *Mondo Cane No. 2, Women of the World*, *Africa Addio*...); where did you see them; what was the audience like?

BALLARD I was very impressed by Jacopetti's films — I saw all of them from 1964 or so onwards — they were shown in small cinemas in the West End, and to full or more-or-less full houses, and my impression is that the audiences completely got the "point". As far as I remember, the response of the people sitting around me was strong and positive. I think there was comparatively little sex in the first *Mondo Cane*, and I can't recall even one dirty raincoat. The audience was the usual crew of rootless inner Londoners (the best audience in the world) drawn to an intriguing new phenomenon. At the time, some twenty years had gone by since the war's end, and everyone had seen the WWII newsreels — Belsen, corpses being bulldozed, dead Japanese on Pacific Islands and so on. All grimly real, but safely distanced from the audiences by a sign that said "horrors of war". What the *Mondo Cane* audiences wanted was the horrors of peace, yes, but they also wanted to be reminded of their own complicity in the slightly dubious process of documenting these wayward examples of human misbehaviour. I may be wrong, but I think that the early *Mondo Cane* films concentrated on bizarre customs rather than horrors, though the gruesome content grew fairly rapidly, certainly in the imitator's films.

But the audiences were fully aware that they were collaborating with the films, and this explains why they weren't upset when what seemed to be faked sequences (they might have been real in fact) started to appear in the later films — there was almost the sense that they *needed* to appear "faked" to underline the audience's awareness of what was going on — both on screen and inside their own heads. We needed violence and violent imagery to drive the social (and political) revolution that was taking place in the mid 1960s — violence and sensation, more or less openly embraced, were pulling down the old temples. We needed our "tastes" to be corrupted — Jacopetti's films were part of an elective psychopathy that would change the world (so we hoped, naively). Incidentally, all this was missing from the way audiences (in the Curzon cinema I think) saw another 1960s shockumentary — *The Savage Eye* — when I saw it I, like the audience, shuddered but felt no complicity at all. A fine film.

GOODALL Can you recall any critical or other 'professional' reactions to Jacopetti's films when they were released?

BALLARD The critical/respectable reaction to the Jacopetti films was uniformly hostile

and dismissive. As always, this confirmed their originality and importance.

GOODALL Jacopetti has distanced himself from the films that later copied *Mondo Cane* labelling them "counterfeit". What were/are your impressions of the copies of his films?

BALLARD I can't remember any specific imitations, though I must have seen one or two. They were too obvious, ignoring the delicate balance between "documentary" footage on the one hand, and on the other the need to remind the audience of its role in watching the films, and that without its intrigued response the films wouldn't function at all. The balance between the "real" and the ironic simulation of the real had to be walked like a tightrope.

GOODALL How did mondo films influence your own work/ideas/thought processes (in particular *The Atrocity Exhibition*)?

BALLARD For me, the *Mondo Cane* films were an important key to what was going on in the media landscape of the 1960s, especially post the JFK assassination. Nothing was true, and nothing was untrue (*The Atrocity Exhibition* tried to find a new sense in what had become a kind of morally virtual world) — "which lies are true?"

GOODALL What in your view was important about Jacopetti's films? Do you think the films have any relevance to the present day, or to the future?

BALLARD I suspect they're very much of their time, but that isn't a fault, necessarily. But there are many resonance's today as in the Bush/Blair war in Iraq — complete confusion of the simulated, the real and the unreal, and the acceptance of this by the electorate. Reality is constantly redefining itself, and the electorate/audience seems to like this — a Prime Minister, religiously sincere, lies to himself and we accept his self-delusions. There's a strong sense today that we prefer a partly fictionalised reality onto which we can map our own dreams and obsessions. The *Mondo Cane* films were among the first attempts to provide the collusive fictions that constitute reality today. Wartime propaganda, and the *Believe it or Not* (Ripley) comic strip of bizarre facts in the 1930s, were assumed to be largely true, but no one today thinks the same of the official information flowing out of Iraq — or out of 10 Downing Street and the Pentagon and significantly this *doesn't* unsettle us.

A Gualtiero Jacopetti retrospective occurred as part of the 2003 National Museum of Photography Film & Television's Bradford International Film Festival. The retrospective was a collaboration between the festival and the department of postgraduate studies at the School of Art and Design, Bradford College.

Previous page **"Counterfeit" mondo: *Mondo di notte*.** This page **Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi in a publicity shot.**

Produced by GUALTIERO JACOPETTI • TECHNICOLOR • A Times Film Release

TREMBLE to the brutal never-before-filmed rites of a tribe from the dawn of time. **EXPLORE** the terrifying tomb of the dead...guarded by a million skeletons. **GASP** at the spectacle of man pitted against bull, armed only with his two hands. **WITNESS** the strange bathhouse customs of the Japanese man...and woman. **DISCOVER** an exotic French manner of painting...using female bodies instead of brushes. **CRINGE** at the Cult of The Blood practiced by the Secret Society of Martyrs. **THRILL** to the beautiful beach maidens of Australia...who could turn a drowning into a delight. **STARTLE** to the savage man-eating sharks...and man's even more savage revenge. **SWEEP** along the dazzling Riviera...and sample its pleasures. **SHOCK** as you see the diet of reptiles...a delicacy of the Orient. **MEET** human beings who are fattened for nuptial sacrifice on the wedding night. **WALK** upon the atom wasted Atolls of the South Pacific...amid the monster breed of animal life they spawned.

Mondo as Document

"see the world in the raw"

For me... there is almost no boundary between documentary film and films of fiction. The cinema, the art of the double, is already a transition from the real world to the imaginary world
Jean Rouch

Pure objectivity does not exist in documentary
Franco Prosperi

GIVEN the plethora of exploitation/trash material now lurking under the mondo banner it's easy to forget that *Mondo Cane* was at first a new and unique type of documentary film, albeit a film acting as a direct riposte to what up until that point had been known as 'documentary' practice. In the Anglo-Saxon world the meaning of documentary had been shaped by leading theorists Grierson, Flaherty etc (Jacopetti acknowledges this in his *Considerations...* See appendix) whose work in turn influenced neo-realism which emerged in the post war period led by Italian directors Rossellini, Visconti, De Sica and screenwriters such as Zavattini. The films that emerged as part of this were driven by an aim for authenticity and/or to express a clearly identifiable 'argument'. In documentary film this resulted in what Bill Nichols calls the 'expository' and 'observational' modes where the director/filmmaker imparts information/posits argument or merely observes what is happening in front of the camera lens, without intervention or comment: either a propagandist tool or a puritanical notion of film production as an exercise in factual record. Grierson's agenda for documentary was reformist positioned from the democratic left and with a strong enlightenment aim (docu-theorist Brian Winston later showed how Grierson's agenda was, in fact, untenable, his films commissioned as they were by British Conservative administrations). Jacopetti and Prosperi's contra-methodology, funded privately by Italian publisher Angelo Rizzoli, was adopted by French filmmaker Jean Rouch who himself moved away from expository/observational modes and was criticised, much as Jacopetti would be, for problematising the way in which documentary films are "still bound to reason, to words, to Baconian plain style" (Paul Stoller) and negating through their work Grierson's Calvinist notion of evidence (although ironically Grierson fa-

mously defined documentary as a "creative treatment of actuality"). In the same way that Rouch's poeticism and 'indirect language' was not rebuffed by European and North American academics so too the work of Jacopetti suffered from its unusual and striking approach to documentary filmmaking (British reviews of *Mondo Cane* when it was released did align Jacopetti's technique to Rouch but as a lesser variant of the conception of documentary being creative as well as reportative, a duality John Corner calls "the art of record"). Jacopetti mistrusted the 'authentic' truth of neo-realism — the way in which fictional films were presented, visually and ideologically, as fact — rejecting the idea that the indexical function of (cinema) photography is 'truthful' or 'evidential'. Jacopetti and Prosperi's 'realism' owes as much to the tradition of representing reality through literary "mimetics" (Eric Auerbach) found in the work of compatriots Boccacio and Dante, the art of the *commedia* where grotesque comedy can be intrinsic to the notion of realism. Jacopetti not only shares this poetic approach to documentary with these compatriots and with Rouch, but also with another French director Barbet Schroeder, whose more honest approach to documentary film production is clearly articulated through the practice of putting "some fiction into documentary and some documentary into fiction" (Schroeder's *Idi Amin Dada: a Self Portrait* contains odd poetic narration intrusions; his bizarre *La Valée*, a fictional film concerning a group of western hippies embarking on a journey into an unknown zone of Papua New Guinea on a quest for transcendental and spiritual reawakening is a surreal trip where the 'action' is augmented by documentary sequences representing real 'primitive' practices and rituals). Schroeder, like Jacopetti, has also made clear the importance of the edit process in the creation of the film art as well as a similar concern with the use of colour processes for effect. In celebrating the art of the edit Jacopetti again breaks with formal documentary modes which do not avoid the edit process but will minimize or limit the amount of cuts made as this draws attention to the artificiality of the film process and thus destroys any notion of truth or realism, or "lived experience" (Nichols). This observational authenticity found its fullest expression in the direct cinema of the US and Free Cinema in the UK while ethnographic directors such as David MacDougall make great play of the lived experience they locate within the rushes, unedited film as it was shot, as opposed to the lost vitality of edited film sequences. Editing for MacDougall "Centres particular meanings" for him a negative or problematic function. For Jacopetti it seems the very essence of his film art. Michael Renov meanwhile outlines four tendencies in documentary practice: to record, reveal, or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyse or interrogate; to express, tendencies which we are expected to locate with varying degrees within documentary film works. Another theorist, Karl Heider, proposed "attributes" which a film could be measured against to affirm its documentary status. The remarkable thing about mondo films is that they manage to collapse these tendencies into one unique practice.

Yet Jacopetti goes beyond description and evidence in his documentary style, instead forging unique 'documentary poetics' imbuing the material recorded by the camera with his own personal and researched take on the events. This documentary-poetic work of Jacopetti and other mondo films conforms rather to Bordwell's notion of poetics as a "conceptual framework within which particular questions about films' composition and effects can be posed" and it is this that makes it so fascinating.

Fakes

Mondo films, and the material they present to the world as 'actualities' have commonly been labelled fake, while the more exploitative mondo films were clearly conceived with

a 'flexible' approach to evidence-based film. When applied to the work of Jacopetti and Prosperi such accusations appear harsh, whose 'integrity' is upset by these accusations and whose 'honest' approach to documentary filmmaking has been clearly and regularly stated (particularly by Jacopetti; Prosperi seems at times to be more ambivalent). The words 'fake' and 'documentary' are uncomfortable and always create controversy whenever they are matched (see for example the controversy over German filmmaker Michael Born's fake documentaries and the UK Carlton Television Colombian drug cartels debacle). Arguments in documentary theory have consistently engaged in the question of where 'creative treatment' of actuality becomes 'fiction'. The structural criticism of the 1970s argued for a purist notion of documentary, exposing works with artistic or creative pretensions as inauthentic coupled with a fear that some of the leading theorists (Grierson) had too much 'faith in film'. Reflecting back on this now it seems that the theoretical ideas developed by Jacopetti were correct in asserting the 'honesty' of the director, the author, above any attempt at pure 'objectivity'. While clearly some scenes, even in the most convincing mondo films were necessarily 'mocked up', it is perhaps the intentions of the authors that are more important than the fidelity (the scenes depicting the ritual protest suicide of a Buddhist monk in *Mondo Cane No.2* have been dissected by Kerekes and Slater and more recently the directors have owned up, claiming that their job is to "make cinema" as well as documentary). The notion of documentary as a true representation is challenged by such activity but a retelling of events in certain instances may be permissible.

This page **Ritual protest suicide of a Buddhist monk in *Mondo Cane No.2*.**

Travelogue

A curious parallel can be drawn between literary approaches to exploration and the mondo film aesthetics. In analysing travel writing of the colonial period Mary Louise Pratt posits three strategies taken by 'Imperial' travel writers in recording 'other' territories: 'estheticisation' (description of the landscape); 'density of meaning' (application of semantic discourse — exposition); 'mastery' (control over the seen by the seer). In documentary film terms there can be a relation between these strategies and documentary modes of practice: estheticisation (opening shots of landscape); density of meaning (exposition of narrative content); mastery (power of the documentaries to control and shape the story) and in particular the way in which mondo films are constructed. The mode of the travelogue embodies many of the principles of the travel writer and this again is something that many mondo scenes relate to. The final manifestation of the link between travel writing/travelogue modes of representation and mondo are the writings of Alberto Moravia who, as well as penning travel books, provided the scripts for *Magia Nuda* and *Ultime Grida dalla Savana*. Moravia's travel writing was modernist in style and more 'real' but still operated within the strategies outlined above, and was 'authoritative' — so was ideally integrated into the mondo aesthetic. Indeed Pratt's analysis of the impulse of such writings "to condemn what they see, to trivialize it, and disassociate themselves utterly from it" rings true as a description of the mondo mode. In this world landscapes and people are still primitive, or spoilt by the encroachment of 'civilizing' influences (the "white man's lament"), the voice is unequivocal and forceful. The accusations levelled at Moravia's "coding of the third world" in Pratt's work, its "rhetoric of triviality, dehumanisation and rejection" is mirrored in the stinging critiques that Jacopetti and Prosperi endured upon the release of *Africa Addio*. The notion of presenting an over-arching critique on a subject is a mondo feature and runs throughout many mondo films — the logical extension of the 'I see all' perspective on global events and customs. It is a powerful and commanding position, as a documentarist' to be in and it demands respect. Pratt notes that travel writers are not able to possess the scenes they witness (they can evaluate) but documentary filmmakers move nearer to ownership of their representations, working in the cinematic mode where meaning is created in the edit and postproduction process back in the comfort of their own environment and with all the tools of the cinematic art at their disposal.

The Voice of God

As we have noted some documentary modes have suppressed the voice-of-god narration as an intrusive, prescriptive communication tool. But in the mondo aesthetic the narration and script are central to the creation of meaning in the film and here after opening up the meaning of the scenes begins to develop a *mastery* over the subject. The mondo film employed some of the finest exponents of narration, many of them the most famous voices in film history (George Sanders, Edmund Purdom, Peter Ustinov, Vincent Price). Narration in mondo occupies a magical space in film art, that between the sounds which naturally belong to the world on screen and those which do not. The latter Ralph Stephenson defines as the commentative — in mondo films the disembodied commentary of an outside observer. There are some specific manifestations of film sound in mondo that relate to the narration and its power: while disembodied voices occur in documentary many mondo films exploit the notion of the narrated as remarking ironically on the action after the event (Jacopetti and Prosperi's *Women of the World*, for example, is described as being "viewed" by the English language narrator Peter Ustinov).

Ustinov is famous, in his own work, for the wry, sometimes racist observations he makes on global cultures and customs. In an interview with *Shock Cinema* Edmund Purdom meanwhile posited the opposite stance: that for him, the many narrations of mondo films he delivered were done without reference to the visual cues ("I took very little interest in the content of these documentaries"). Instead Purdom read the script out in isolation. Needless to say, both of these alienating effects would be despised by conventional documentary practitioners (Heider's purist ethnographic attributes deplores any "overly wordy", "banal" narration). Ironic contrasts, counterpoint, is a significant mondo device played through violent juxtaposition in the compiling, but no less so in structure of the narration. Often the pomposity or pretentiousness of human activity will be undercut either by droll narrative comment, patronising mockery or racist abuse — sometimes all of these at once. "Narration is what you do when you fail" Robert Drew once claimed, speaking of documentary. Yet without this ever-present, sneering, mocking companion, the mondo films would not properly exist.

The other important aspect of Italian mondo films was the fact that all Italian films of this period were made with post-synchronous sound. This extended even into mainstream, 'serious' drama features where the provincial accents of Italian actors were dubbed by studios into conventional Roman dialect. Therefore with this practice commonplace the fragmentary effect of the sound and visual relationship was exploited as a feature of mondo. Stam and Shohat define this as an oppressive inauthentic gesture of ideology; for mondo directors it aided the weirdness of the finished film. Any calls for restraint were loudly ignored as some of the more hysterical commentaries testify.

So the mondo film enjoys a troubled relationship with that of the documentary genre.

This page **Landscapes of the travel writer in the mondo film. From top left: *Nuova Guinea*, *L'Isola dei Cannibali*, *Zio Tom*, *Ultime Grida dalla Savana*.**

It exits both as part of the documentary tradition, but is estranged profoundly from it. The films examined in this chapter will serve to illustrate this further.

Mondo Cane

Dir: Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi, Paolo Cavara
Italy, 1962

In my opinion there is no difference between journalism that is written and journalism that is cinematographic
Gualtiero Jacopetti

Warning: See Mondo Cane on an empty stomach. Money-back guarantee: after seeing it, you'll pass up the pâté
Peter Bunzel

Overpowering, fascinating – often shocking!
LIFE says– "The season's most argued about film."
MONDO CANE
Produced by Gualtiero Jacopetti
A TIMES FILM RELEASE
enter a hundred incredible worlds where the camera has never gone before!

□ Given the plethora of films dedicated to the proposition that the world is full of strange things, and that such things need to be shown to paying audiences, it is justifiably hard now to appreciate the impact of the original shockumentary film. While many commentators have argued that the art of the shockumentary began long before Gualtiero Jacopetti decide to create the feature-length newsreel that became *Mondo Cane*, a close examination of the film reveals that this perception is false and that Jacopetti was right to claim the film as "a one off, an original". *Mondo Cane* was conceived with, and still exhibits, a uniquely Italian sensibility: a potent combination of post-war liberalism (a radical position in a staunchly Catholic country protected by conservative Christian political parties), journalistic tendencies (Jacopetti began as a reporter under the tutelage of Indro Montanelli, the godfather of radical Italian newspaper journalism, while key cinematographer Antonio Climati was trained as a news-cameraman) and ethnographic/anthropological research (Prosperi and location manager Stanis Nievo began as marine biologists, albeit thrill-seeking ones). The film was conceived as a violent repudiation of the post-war Italian obsession with neo-realism which, in its attempts at representing a form of gritty actuality through location shooting, deployment of non-professional actors, and use of monochrome film stock, Jacopetti found unconvincingly staged — "artificial". He headed in the opposite direction producing a surreal, thrilling Technicolor version of the staid cinema newsreel, commonly shown in theatres to 'educate' the population about world events. Jacopetti developed a reputation for the controversial, both private (legend has it that Fellini wanted to consult Jacopetti for advice on the orgy scene in *La Dolce Vita*) and professional, and as his newsreels were underwritten by the producer and publishing mogul Angelo Rizzoli, thus evading state doctrine, Jacopetti had somewhat of a free

hand. His previous work with Alessandro Blasetti on *Europa di Notte* (see chapter four) had opened up the possibility of showing the bizarre and the shocking and the real in the documentary sphere.

In addition to documentary attributes, *Mondo Cane* is shot through with a macabre sense of grisly black humour especially in relation to the rituals and practices of the western world, a rarity at the time and one since acknowledged as being important and original. Erik Barnouw, for example, in his classic text *Documentary*, noted that the western documentary tendency for "colonialist predilections, by which white men buttressed assumptions of superiority" was uniquely overturned by *Mondo Cane*, which responded to the question "were weird practices not available to filmmakers elsewhere — in Europe and America for example?" with considerable vigour. *Mondo Cane* transgresses many boundaries and received practices and its contradictory/contrasting attributes have ensured that the reaction to the film has always been accordingly confused. The film rapidly became a talking point across a range of cultural spheres. The film's moral ambiguity and lack of what the *Monthly Film Bulletin* described as a "precisely defined attitude towards its material" made it 'problematic' for some. *Mondo Cane* featured in Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool,* a critique of shock journalistic practices. Wexler was himself a trained news-cameraman (he had shot Joseph Strick's proto-mondo *The Sav-*

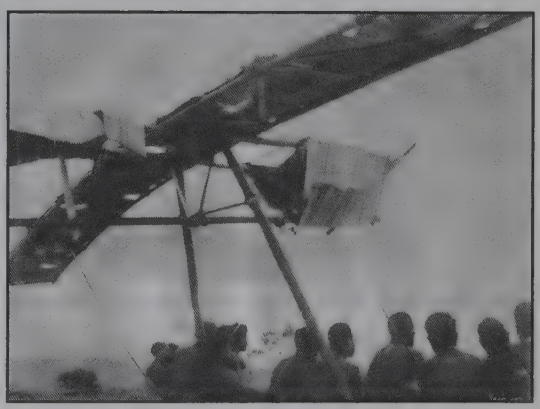
This page **Pig feast in New Guinea, the 'kingdom of hunger'. One of the scenes in *Mondo Cane*, a film the *Monthly Film Bulletin* called a "catalogue of horrors".**

age Eye) and reflected the troubled ethics of his trade in this film. At one point the main character discusses the questionable morals of filming 'reality', in this instance social tensions in 1968 Chicago, citing *Mondo Cane* as an exemplar of journalistic controversy ("how should I know what their motives were: they were Italian!" he cries). The *Monthly Film Bulletin* called the film a "catalogue of horrors" a "hymn to death and mutilation embellished with a shrug and a giggle". Other reviews criticised the film's lack of 'objectivity'. Yet in his survey of "Classics of the Foreign Film", Parker Tyler aligns it with Georges Franju's surrealist abattoir shockumentary *Le Sang des Bêtes* (*Blood of the Beasts*), locating the film within the realm of art documentary, and describing the film's attitude to its material (positively) as "hysteria", a film which "tangles our optical nerves within a continuous snarl of global boundary lines". "Jacopetti's colour cameras are voracious and frank in what they see", noted Bosley Crowther in the *New York Times* while *Life* magazine described the film as a travelogue with "a diabolical nerve shattering difference...depicted in blood-curdling Technicolor". Some reviews eventually incorporated the ambiguity of the film into their assessments: Judith Crist writing in the American *Herald Tribune* described it as "Intelligent and repellent...cultured and coarse...its artistic aspirations brought low by its vulgar venality, its fascinating truths obscured by prurient practices". There is, in fact, contrary to the negative comments, an *exact* preciseness in the way that *Mondo Cane* was conceived, clearly evident in the various juxtapositions of the 'modern' and the 'primitive' but also thematically — a feat never again achieved in the mondo cannon and one which estranges *Mondo Cane* from the weak imitations trailing in its wake: thus Jacopetti's journalistic sensibilities, the search for weird stories, were an important ingredient in the creation of the film.

All of the components of what we now know as mondo were forged in this film and these became the often distorted blueprint for all other mondo-style cinematic works. These include depictions of: the bizarre rituals of world cultures and religions; man's cruelty towards animals; the encroachment of technological 'development' onto the 'natural world'; sex and death in the modern epoch together with the combination of visual savagery with audio sweetness. The ambitious sprawling nature of the film is what has always made it so exciting even if some of the 'shocking' aspects of the film seem tame by today's brutal standards.

Much has also been made of the compilation aspect of *Mondo Cane* and the accusation that Jacopetti and Prosperi 'bought in' footage from other sources (the 'evidence' for this being the list of collaborators at the end). This is another specious aspect of the film's legend: *Mondo Cane* was strongly fi-

nanced by the wealthy producer Rizzoli and is clearly filmed in what became the trademark Jacopetti/Climati style — fantastic use of intrusive, wide-angled lens close-ups, hand-held movement towards scenarios, exquisite framing and composition. Jacopetti has claimed that the team "shot almost two million feet of film": this is buttressed, separately, by Prosperi who recently explained how they efficiently shot masses of material in one location to leave them enough for a sequel, and more. The film is brilliantly edited by Jacopetti setting standards unreachable for most mondo mimics. One sequence in particular illustrates the virtuosity of this technique: in Singapore the terminally ill are left in a 'house of death' to slowly wither away while a ritual feast and wild dance is held by their relatives nearby. These two scenarios are cleverly and precisely intertwined, the contrasts between the sadness of death and the joy of living depicted in increasingly rapid cuts (and musical synchrony). The life traces in the faces of the dying appear to fade before our eyes. Notwithstanding the power of this scene Jacopetti recently told me that given the opportunity he would edit the sequence differently and "half the length of it". Despite this the cuts in *Mondo Cane* are always lively and quick and it is through this that Jacopetti and Prosperi created the 'shock cut' — the jarring movement without warning from one scene to another. "To keep the audience's interest alive there needs to be a contrast of images", Jacopetti claimed. Within this area of technique however there were different approaches: the famous 'shock cut' at the start of the film, a sharp jump from a close-up of the breasts of girls parading to attract American sailors along the French Riviera to the breast of a New Guinea native suckling an orphan pig is shocking, emphasised with a violent dramatic chord by the composers of the film's music, Riz Ortolani and Nino Oliviero. The cut between dog worship at the Pasadena pet cemetery and dog eating on the island of Formosa is similarly startling. The cut between shots of discarded



Previous page **(left & right) A contrast of images: A girl parading along the French Riviera and a New Guinea native.**
This page **(from top) Malaysian fishermen meting out revenge on sharks; cargo cult; drunken Germans. *Mondo Cane*.**

automobiles into a section on the absurdities of contemporary art are gentler and the brutal sacrifice of a Ghurkha ritual (a cow is beheaded) leads into Portuguese *Forcada* (bull-running) by a freeze frame shot of the animal. The originality of the film resides in its still amusing portrayal of the rituals of the so-called developed world. While the film contains its share of typical mondo 'primitive' ritual (tribal pig feast in New Guinea, Malaysian fishermen meting out bitter revenge on the sharks that have amputated their limbs, brides of the Bismarck Archipelago stuffed and held in cages, Cargo Cults) it is perhaps the examples of civilized brutality that are the most eye-catching. These range from the silly (female Australian lifeguards 'practising' their kiss-of-life drill on the willing local male population, an exclusive New York restaurant serving up ants, stuffed beetles, muskrat, roasted worms, the rites of drunken Germans in Hamburg), the dangerous (Portuguese bull running where participants are gored and tossed about) to the macabre (children polishing the bones of the dead in a Roman cemetery). One of the most intriguing sequences is on a religious ritual of Calabrian peasants, *I Vatienti*, who on Good Friday lacerate their legs with shards of glass before running through the streets in a simulation of the sufferings of Christ. For affluent filmmakers of the Italian (and European) North these scenes appear 'primitive' and echo a commonly held derision in Italy towards the south, which embodies the concept of *la miseria*, a resistance to modernisation and a retreat into ancient ritual. The sequence is made unforgettably morbid by the sombre musical accompaniment, a simple organ fugue that begins slowly, increases tempo and then ends ominously. The sequence starts with a shock freeze-frame of one of the genuflecting participants. The garish violence of the film (particularly the colour) is still entrancing, the artificiality of Jacopetti and Prosperi's interpretation of documentary one of the film's notable aspects. This free-form approach is highlighted in the sequence on the French conceptual artist Yves Klein — an ideal mondo subject as his performances, dubbed *Anthropometries*, incorporate elements of burlesque (the models are daubed in blue paint and pressed on to the canvas), spiritualism/mysticism (Klein was a Rosicrucian), nudity (the models are attractive young naked women). Klein's obsession with the colour blue, which he later patented, repre-

sents the sky and the globe and the theorist of his *Les Nouveaux Réalistes* movement, Pierre Restany, who went on to create his own 'mondo-style' publication on global art, culture and ritual *Planète*. Paolo Cavara was dispatched to Paris to shoot the sequence that Klein imagined would be a tribute to his art. Jacopetti however used the shots as an attack on the egomania, delusion and pomposity of modern art replacing Klein's specially composed *Monotone Symphony* with a lush, instrumental version of the *Mondo Cane* theme (in some versions of the film this is the vocal version sung by Katyna Ranieri) and supplying some derisory narration. When Klein visited the Cannes Film Festival to view the finished film the artist was so furious that, according to myth, he induced one of the heart attacks that were to later kill him (he is referred to in the film as "Czechoslovakian" which may have made his blood boil). Given this collage of weird and wonderful scenarios it is easy to forget the starkness of the film's remarkable opening images: simple hand-held point-of-view (POV) shots of a dog being led reluctantly into a compound. There is no narration (in the original Italian film, the English version has the narrator read the text out, pointlessly and incorrectly), only the desperate barking of the dogs, as the opening statement of intent fades into view. It is worth noting that the narration in the original Italian, by Stefano Sibaldi, one of the best dubbing voices in Italy, is quiet and understated, rather than hysterical and pompous, creating a sense of cynicism rather than mockery. Another of the successful aspects of the film was its musical score, in particular the theme tune which, when supplemented with English lyrics by Norman Newell, became the song More, one of the most successful songs ever written notching up over a thousand versions and seven million broadcast performances.

The film ends with the sombre portrayal of the 'Cargo Cult', a ritual practice held by Aboriginal natives who mistake the cargo planes that fly into Port Moresby airport for

objects from paradise bearing gifts from their dead ancestors and the airport as a trap the white man has devised to capture these gifts. The natives have constructed their own rickety wooden plane to try and lure the cargo planes towards them instead. This is such a moving and fitting end to the film because it defines the essence of mondo dogma: the destruction of natural habitat and ancient customs by capitalist technologies and the attempts by natives to adapt to these changes, a world "gone to the dogs" perhaps, but one which *Mondo Cane's* sang-froid viewpoint is happy to offer up.

A sequel to the film *Mondo Cane No.2* (*Mondo Pazzo*) was issued by Cineriz. The sequel utilised footage left-over from the original project and whilst fascinating is more akin to the cash-ins that avalanched after the massive success of *Mondo Cane*. Jacopetti, despite his name being credited against the film, has always claimed it to be the work of others, carried out as a contractual requirement. It is the only film directed by Jacopetti and Prosperi without Riz Ortolani's music.

Previous page **A Calabrian religious practice depicted in *Mondo Cane*.**

Mondo Cane 2000

[This is America 3]
Dir: Gabriele Crisanti
Italy, 1988

□ There is a huge difference between the early 1960s shockumentary innovator *Mondo Cane,* and the late eighties melted plastic edifice that is Gabriele Crisanti's *Mondo Cane 2000*. The English language title for the film, *This is America 3*, immediately gives the game away demonstrating vividly the barrel-scraping depths to which the mondo film had plummeted by the end of the twentieth century. Not only is Crisanti's mondo horror unoriginal but it is a very poorly made documentary film. The *mis-en-scene* is ugly and lacks the cinematographic finesse of Climati, Frattari and Ruzzolini, while Claudio Cimpanelli's music, ridiculously fast electro drum rolls and incredibly tinny synthesizer envelopes, would have been outdated before the film was two years old (Cimpanelli was also recruited by Stelvio Massi for his mondo nadir *Mondo Cane Oggi: L'Orrore Continua* (*Mondo Cane No.3*). Crisanti was already known as a producer of standard-quality Italian genre films such as the thriller *Giallo a Venezia* and horrors *Malabimba* and *Zombi Horror*.

Yet the intentions of the film are noble, and one which many directors and critics have indicated a desire to see rendered, namely, the application of mondo aesthetics to the post-modern world and its hideous, ugly face. Crisanti's premise, outlined in the opening diatribe about the 'the primitive' being encroached upon and destroyed by technology and the values of global capitalism, is laudable, critical even. "This is what we call *mondo cane*" narrator David Traylor pontificates; "mysterious, uncontaminated — a paradise lost". The image of an unspoilt (probably South American) dreamland, where 'noble savages' ("people excluded from modern civilization") go about their simple, natural everyday activities is briefly evoked. "These people are regarded by outsiders as exhibits in a zoo" the narrator continues, seemingly unaware of the irony that comes from a genre infamous for gawping at the world's peoples that this statement produces. In preparation for the images to come we are posed with the conundrum: "But is this the real *mondo cane*, or a parallel world?"...

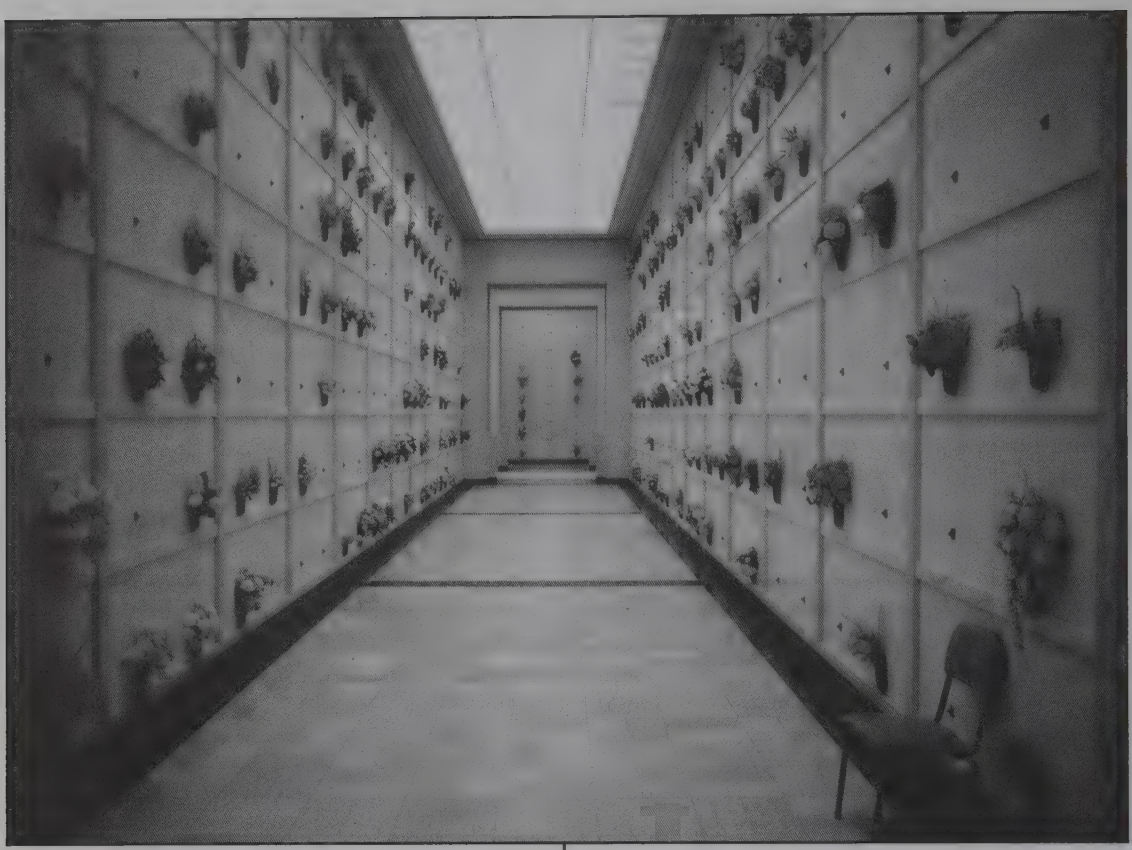
Crisanti then introduces us to the repulsive, vicious world of "blind materialism", through images of the city most likely to represent this concept: New York. The title sequence montage of gesticulating black preachers, body popping hip-hop dancers, blank zombiefied city workers supported by an hopelessly outdated electro-synth soundtrack (this annoying and incessant beat quickly unsettles the viewer, provoking a similar feeling to that of a dentist's drill probing an abscess!). A series of cheap and tacky scenarios unfold beginning with the unintentionally hilarious depiction of a man who fulfils his "kink" by trashing scrapped police cars. The sight of a masked man in a cheap suit wearing a Stetson, piecing together his assembly kit sledgehammer before launching into a slow-motion assault into car windows, bonnets and doors beggars belief, as does the voice-over: "Is he a closet anarchist?" Ridiculous.

Modern-day variants on the old theme of vice-for-sale are offered: porno-taxis (riders can enjoy hard core sex videos while travelling to the office); prostitution and drug

dealing in Central Park (shot with infra-red cameras, a trick copied without advancement, from *Mondo Freudo*); child prostitution (degradation fuelled by "unrestrained consumerism"); group sex "image therapy" and music-driven autoeroticism (explicitly shown and shamelessly pornographic); masochistic massage (an excuse for further tit and bum close-ups); mail-order sex toys and catalogue photo-shoots (medium close-up shot: a penis flops out of its pouch — "talk about letting it all hang out"); arse art: sculptures of female body parts ("a well rounded business capacity"); food shaped like genitals ("porno pastries" — a curiously beautiful piano waltz augments this scene: why?) and so on. A brief foray into 'alternative' drugs taken within rituals is presented in the Andes where a drug called *Tibodio*, forged from burnt cocoa leaves, acts as "the God himself". *Tibodio* also features as part of an Amazonian fertility rite but any sense of anthropological/ethnographic insight disintegrates into cheap exploitation when shock cuts between the priest, the infertile woman and the bludgeoning to death of a cow are shoddily delivered. Then we are presented with a freeze-frame filled record of the hallucinogenic, tarantella-like effects of the *piato* drug ("Is this the *mondo cane* god?"). Transgressions are routinely mocked, as ever: a transvestite is described as a "gay girl guy" (or was it "gay girl guide"?). "Hey, did someone say gay!" the narrator smirks, warming to the theme, and we are transported into the middle of a gay pride march in New York (the variety of homosexuals involved are all attributed mock characteristics, "spaghetti gays" being my personal favourite). Horrific, ultra gory pathologist photos of homophobic murders and bloody mutilation shots are suddenly shoved in our faces abruptly quashing any warm emotions one may have felt at seeing human beings allowed to celebrate their 'difference' freely and openly. Meanwhile the filmmakers find some 'punk hairstyles' shaped like male and female genitalia particularly amusing. The sex obsessions only cease when we are treated to some of the gravest portrayals of late twentieth century science and medicine in the contemporary world: the surgical removal of a monkey's pulsing heart; the removal of a monkey's testicles for 'medical research'; a cadaver whose eyes have been removed and sold. The sickening fascist proposition by one Leonard Bailey to use 'mentally deficient' children's' organs for transplants is critiqued in a typically sensationalist manner: "think about it!" we are ordered. Whether fabricated or not these scenes are always grim, depressing and ultimately hopeless.

Almost as relentless as the techno beats are the references to the "plague of the year 2000" — AIDS. The undisguised fear of the disease is perhaps explained by the timing of the film's production occurring as it did at the high point of paranoia of the phenomenon. Scenes relating to the disease, including children condemned by their parent's infectiousness are indeed thought provoking. Yet being a mondo film the sneers are inevitable, a group of a campaigners for AIDS awareness are labelled a "deadly serious group". Hmmm... The film ends with a grave warning about the "madness and horror of the year 2000". A special effects door opens and we are back again in the pan-pipe drenched world of the 'real' *mondo cane*. A retreat from the present and future into the past from which many have not returned?

At one point, during a sequence on a project producing videos made from secret footage of public toilets, the voice-over describes the director's feeling that his work was like "Fellini, Lucas and Spielberg all rolled into one". Clearly a laughably misguided notion, but one that causes the viewer to wonder (listening to the moralising tone evident in films like *Mondo Cane 2000*) as to whether some mondo filmmakers actually share this viewpoint. It is no surprise, given how far this film and many of those before it have stretched the concept of 'documentary', that even Jacopetti felt moved to denounce such motley and unwelcome subscribers to the genre he invented.



Des Morts

[Of the Dead]
Dir: Jean-Pol Ferbus, Dominique Garny, Thierry Zéno
Belgium, 1979

□ In his book, *Film as a Subversive Art*, Amos Vogel lamented on the lack of filmed material concerned with one of the last visual taboos — "the ultimate secret" — real death. Vogel wrote "that this entire area...(which) simply does not exist in contemporary cinema, reveals taboo in its purest form". This was in 1974. Five years later the Belgium team of Ferbus, Garny and Zéno provided a direct riposte to Vogel's laments — their film *Des Morts*, arguably still the most powerful film on the subject of mortality ever envisaged. (Zéno's name appears last in the direction credits but it would be uncontroversial to say that he, as producer, cinematographer and editor was the principal force behind the film.) Mostly the film is constructed with a deep sense of gravitas and sensitively articulates a vision of 'real' death in the modern world. As a serious documentary film it steadily progresses through an account of what death and dying is like 'in reality'. Shots in the film are generally conceived in the manner of ethnographic/anthropological film studies: expositions are shot from a flat, square, even ugly perspective and there are few 'special effects' such as the use of elliptical lenses or obtuse compositional devices. There is no narration in the film and almost the only sound we hear is that of the synchronised voices of interviewees, diegetic music, or natural sounds emanating from the mis-en-scène. Additional information is conveyed via block capital subtitles (as in ethnographic 'classics' such as Harris, Breidenbach and

Gardner's *The Nuer*). All of which is a style that Zéno perfected elsewhere in his film career (a review, for example, of his 1987 film *Eugène Ionesco, Voix et Silences* in the Belgian journal *La Libre Belgique*, which notes that "the director succeeds by playing down his own role," acts as a reminder of his observational approach). Thus *Des Morts* is a contemplative film that appears to sit uncomfortably in the realm of the mondo film.

The film begins simply and starkly with a medium shot of a young American mortician beginning to describe the post-mortem procedures common to 'civilized' funeral directorships, namely the pathological cleansing of dead bodies, in this case fingernails (the title of the film appears on the screen). The film then cuts to a long sequence on a funeral rite in Thailand (one of two such scenes book ending the film, the other is set in South Korea). A mother who has died is laid out and mourned over, being subjected to sung and played laments, ritual fanning with palm leaves, rifle and crossbow salutes. A feast is prepared from five slaughtered cattle (killed violently, if carefully, so that they fall onto their left side) before she is finally laid to rest in a coffin. Again the sequence is shot in an ethnographic mode: unobtrusive fixed camerawork, simple titles locating place and date, location sound, even translations of the conversations taking place between the native peoples. The access given to the crew, in order to secure such powerful and intimate pictures (the rite takes place over several days) is also that of the ethnographic filmmaker, securing the trust of the people for scientific anthropological purposes and becoming profoundly ensnared in the ritual itself. This sequence is inter-cut with shots of an American funeral where the actions are carried out quickly and efficiently, and by machines. The only music heard here is a loud and meaningless blast of nondescript rock emitting from the hearse driver's radio. The contrast is emphasised when we note that in opposition to the mechanistic lowering of the American coffin by crane, the hand-made Thai coffin has been made way too narrow and the corpse must be wedged in sideways. Further solemn documentary/ethnographic sequences appear: Catholic funerals held under grey Northern European skies (notably those of the directors' homeland); testimonies of terminal muscular dystrophy sufferers and a woman who replays a tape of her dying (now dead) husband to bring him back to life; unique footage inside a cremation chamber of the body's reluctance to become completely immaterial; glaringly lit emergency ward footage of dying and critically wounded Mexican knife victims. The post-mortem footage of a man we have just witnessed dying on screen (Mario Sanchez Fernandez, according to the tape stuck across his chest), harsh, unflinching shots of his head and torso being wrenched open and then crudely sewn back up again, recall the blank, shocking images created by Stan Brakhage in his silent autopsy document *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes*: very serious, very considered and very moving.

And yet *Des Morts* is also a mondo film.

Whereas Brakhage's infamous film simply let the camera roll trying to record as "cleanly" and "sparely" what he saw, Zéno's cutting and shaping of the images in his film resorts to shock and surprise. The first such 'shock cut' of the film, the leap from Eastern to Western funerals, is read at first viewing simply as a defectively rendered montage. But looking again we discover that Zéno actually uses the shock cut to accentuate the jarring differences between attitudes to the act of death. The art of the film edit services the complex metaphysical. The powerful use of non-diegetic music is spare (as would be required of a textbook documentary portrait), yet the slow haunting theme created by Alain Pierre takes the

Previous page **A scene from arguably the most powerful film on the subject of mortality, *Des Morts*.**

already heart-wrenching images to another level. His application, particularly of electronic cues (used as an accompaniment for a sequence on a modern American cortege, and as an eerie accompaniment to a frightening account of cryogenic facilities, where the surreal experiments in freezing corpses for an eventual cure for mortality is treated to spooky electro doodlings) is pleasurably incongruous. 'Lyrical' shots, not slickly convincing but still eerily beautiful, such as the twilight cemetery panorama at the end of the film add a gothic ambience to the mood and extra emotion to the already sombre subject of the film. The calm ethnographic dispatch of large portions of the film is also shattered during the cryogenics sequence. The use of still colour photographs to illustrate the frightful process is conventional enough, but suddenly the interviewee appears as a circular insert to these images. Even for the late 1970s this is a cheesy effect, although arguably fitting for the absurd nature of the subject matter. Even the mondo predilection for animal slaughter is incorporated. The closing bloody moments of a Mexican bullfight (the animal suffers multiple skewerings) is inter-cut with a shop butchering chickens and calves on-site (the severed calf's head is shown still convulsing). The window outside displays the legend *muerto*. Zéno is unable to resist some rapid mondo-style cutting when a bell tolls to herald a Mexican rite urging souls back from the dead. A man in a black hooded robe explains the significance of the ritual through a yellowing towel wrapped over his mouth. *Mondo pazzo* indeed.

The final mondo attribute is the way in which the filmmakers mockingly represent America and the twisted and estranged manner in which western capitalism encompasses mortality. As well as the creepiness of the mortuary assistant (who appears at regular interviews throughout the film), an automaton Norman Bates character with a nervous laugh, there are the people of Sierra Dawn and their trailer park existence, coded as weirdly disturbing (why do home organs seemingly evoke the work of the devil?) and an enterprising businessman describes how he now conducts the scattering of cremated ashes over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco on a "volume basis" (i.e. more than one scattered at any one flight means higher profits). The familiar mondo fixation with Californian pet cemeteries is revisited too. The inclusion of a sequence identified as a "television archive document" featuring an execution of a Philippine rebel informant by his 'comrades', his still-twitching body dumped in to a shallow grave (predating a similar sequence in the British 1990s mondo *Executions*), is, with its sudden appearance in the film's narrative and introduction via an oddly contrived radio report heard over the feeding of the muscular dystrophy sufferers, pure mondo. There is even, in the final moments, an acknowledgement of the inevitable prying role of the filmmaker: a rerun of key scenes in the film over the closing musical passage cleverly and disconcertingly shows the characters we have 'enjoyed' watching turning to look — at times inquisitively, others despairingly straight at the camera — at us. This is a brilliant device that seals the work as an unsensational shockumentary classic and a bitter reminder of the uncomfortable work necessary for the successful acquisition of such unforgettable poignant moments in the history of the human condition, living or dead.

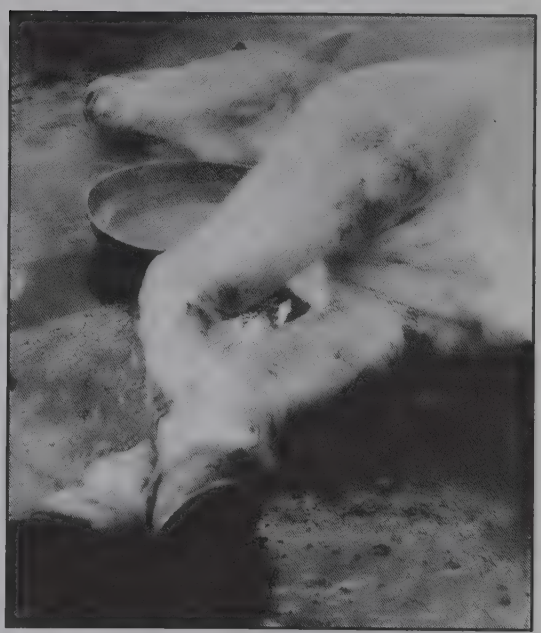
Des Morts is not one of the most shocking mondo films but it is certainly one of the most memorable. Its 'mondo-ness' is understated and cleverly manipulated by a master film poet. The quiet elegance of *Des Morts* (Vogel once worried, correctly, that Zéno would be "written out of official film history") ensured that the film troubled society's moral guardians significantly less than the terror of its makers' first widely banned feature *Vase de Noces* (*Wedding Trough*), a film about a man screwing, killing and then eating his pet pig.

Mondo & Shock Cinema

"every scene looks you in the eye — and spits"

I don't think there is much hope for the future of the cinema. Shortly, if not already, it will no longer be possible to enter a movie house because the mere fact of stepping into it, apart from the film actually showing, may mean entering an indecent place, a brothel for maniacs
Claudio Sorgi

Shock, from the beginning. I always look for this. It's inside of me. It's life. Life is a continuous passage from one feeling to another
Gualtiero Jacopetti



Le Sang des Bêtes

IN THEIR book, *Cinema as Art* Ralph Stephenson and J R Debrix, in discussing the work of French director Georges Franju, noted that "the brutality of *Le Sang des Bêtes* would have been unbearable if the film had been in colour". If film is capable of delivering shocks more cruelly depending on the use of the chromatic, then the mondo film seeks to make the unbearable a vivid and amplified form of exotic film art. It was astute of Stuart Swezey (in his *Amok Journal*) to call Jacopetti a "master technician of shock in the human organism"; the work of Jacopetti

and other mondo directors explores the effect of visceral shock on the cinematic audience and it is such mechanics of shock cinema that this chapter hopes to examine, illustrate and explain. Swezey called *Mondo Cane* a true "experiment in terror" and contrasted the powerful churning effects of the mondo film, unfavourably, with that of the more renowned genres of film shock — slasher movies, zombie and cannibal films, video nasties. There are however links that can be made between the emergence of the Italian mondo film and the aesthetics of Italian horror and exploitation film: what Tentori and Bruschini call the "pseudo-mondo film" (Palmieri and Mistretta refer to mondo as "horror's mad cousin"). So the ways in which mondo helped to legitimise shock in popular film is fascinating and important too. The very fact that mondo films are termed 'shockumentaries' states the acceptance of cinema shock as an essential ingredient of the genre. Tellingly it is the shock element of mondo which has filtered through into the shocks of the contemporary TV age — viewing designed to hit the viewer in the face "like a ton of bricks". The French writer and surrealist Antonin Artaud, amongst others, considered 'theatre' as an assault on the audience ("the cinema is a direct and rapid language which has no need for a slow and ponderous logic"), a process mondo films sometimes attempt to conform to. The Jacopettian self-defined device of the "shock cut" makes powerful and long-lasting use of the film splice, the edit. Examples will illustrate this but for now it is enough to define this methodology as an affront the conventional 'laws' of cinematic art — to hide the cut from audiences (Bazin called this "invisible cutting"). In mondo films the cut is up fronted, experimental, crude, abrupt, startling...shocking and this mostly occurs as a deliberately coded effect. In an attempt to explain the validity of shock cuts in documentary Jacopetti argued that "Brusque passages are life. Soft passages are history, they're not the daily experience". So in mondo the shock aesthetic represents the recording of events and rituals as 'reality'; a reality to be experienced — not rationalised — by the viewer. This is the value and use of shock in mondo.

Ado Kyrou, whose essays on surrealism and the cinema are still widely quoted, stated that in film "nowhere else does the ugly come so close to the sublime...the uncanny" and the mondo film has always excelled at utilising shock to illustrate difficult aspects of world culture as entertainment. Amos Vogel states that "however irrational, the taboo image reflects subconscious realities still operative in men". In this way shock and provocation hold much more than a simply visceral effect on the viewer and their senses, they act on the subconscious desires and thoughts to leave a marked effect. The size of the cinematic image contributes greatly to this shock effect; Vogel is not the only critic to have observed the powerful effects of the cinema/theatre space on the film effect "in flinching from or in reverential complicity with the taboo image, we elevate a reflection of moving light patterns to the statues of truth".

Shock has featured as an essential aspect of 1960s and 1970s Italian film whether at the low end of the cinematic hierarchy (the horror and *giallo* cycles) or at the so-called high (Cavani's *Beyond Evil*, Pasolini's *Salò*) where shock is utilised as a polemical device to jolt audiences out of any calm complacency upon entering the cinema space. *Salò* was once called "perhaps the most successful representation of physical cruelty in the history of cinema", a film that makes brilliant and troubling use of ritualised tableaux. The cinematic apparatus itself — especially in the documentary film — exerts a form of assault on the object filmed, the camera-eye positions adopted by the camera perfect for the cold thrill of horror but also that of the mondo film. Clover calls this "assaultive gazing" — the ways in which the film camera penetrates the subject through a variety of means. There may be differing degrees of this 'assault' (Clover is interested in a deep penetration) but in a film like Jacopetti's *Zio*

Tom the assault is an idealized voyeuristic 'I-camera' attack perfected by highly developed use of shockumentary techniques. The audience is drawn in to the shock moments and becomes ensnared in images of sexual possession and repulsive sadism. Mondo films are always inviting us, the audience, to look and be repelled by what we see — an ideal horror aesthetic.

The Italian cinema produced in its golden age of exploitation and cult films a wealth of directors and technicians capable of utilising the tools of cinematography for shock effect. The work of Lucio Fulci and Sergio Martino, to name but two, is renowned for expressionistic use of the hand-held camera, pans, zooms, tilts with rapid clean cutting being a feature of Italian film that bled into many of the best mondo works.

The links between mondo and horror can be epitomised by Ruggero Deodato's 1979 film *Cannibal Holocaust*, a notorious critique of shockumentary methodologies that the director called "a clear and straightforward denunciation of the 'journalistic approach'". Ever since the release of this film the world conflates 'mondo' with 'horror', 'cruelty' and 'snuff'.

Away from the realm of horror the aesthetics of shock appeared in avant-garde experimental groups such as the Vienna Action Group whose filmed performances shocked the senses in the late 1960s/early 1970s. These films were conceived as Artaudian blows to the audiences' perceptions and rationalities whilst illustrating a further Freudian dimension to the notion of shock images in cinema. Intriguingly these art films share with horror the central motif of blood and its uses/misuses. Hermann Nitsch, one of the principle Vienna Action group artists claims his art tries to bring the senses close to the response of disgust, yet art critic Adrian Searle stated "art cannot imagine how disgusting life can be", at least film is the art form that brings such raw cycles of life closer. Mondo films are often 'disgusting'.

Overall, the mondo film delivers more visceral shocks than the conventional horror film as its root in the (sur)reality of global spaces and the numbness of witnessing real violence, death, tragedy unleashes power as yet untapped or neutered by contemporary art and culture.

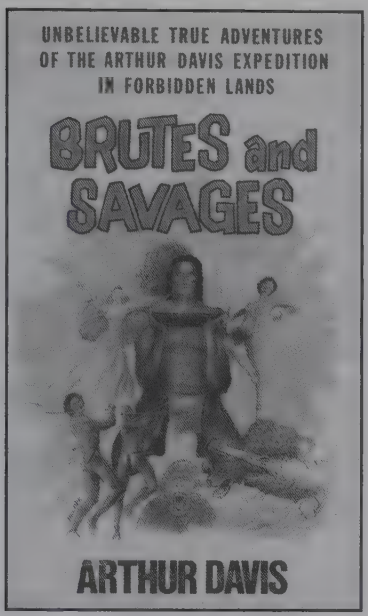
Brutes and Savages

Dir: Arthur Davis
USA, 1978

□ The mondo director has long been criticized for his narcissistic approach to the art of the documentary film record and its ill-fated subjects. The mechanics of the mondo film, imbued as they commonly are with a strong sense of individualistic words, thoughts and deeds, encourage such criticism — more perhaps than any other kind of filmmaking enterprise. Yet even against such a background the remarkable contribution of Arthur Davis to mondo reveals the most monstrous, untamed ego in the entire history of the sub-genre. Davis's crazed film, *Brutes and Savages,* is one of the most astonishing, disingenuous and disgusting of all mondo films, standing as a testament to the worst excesses of the shockumentary condition. Due to this alone the film is worthy of closer examination. *Brutes and Savages* is crowded by Davis's ridiculous presence but his book of the film, a thin facsimile of John Cohen's *Africa Addio* account, is also notable for excesses of self-promotion, where he modestly describes himself as an "author, world traveller, motion picture producer and director". In fact, Davis was renowned as an exploitation film distributor and a showman in the grand burlesque tradition, and so his infamous mondo production is merely the ill-advised public face of his self-overindulgence. The *Brutes and Savages* book weakly posits an entirely spurious 'anthropological' motive for the making of the film, a pretence that slips away almost as soon as the film has begun. Davis's talk of the "tantalising

beauty" and "fascination of 'Brutes and Savages'" quickly gives way to homoerotic, voyeuristic, humans-as-animals accounts of tribal ritualistic activity. Davis's approach mirrors the worst excesses of mondo film-making where the subjects are there to be exploited and humiliated or at best (secretly) recorded and documented (in his reflection on the project Davis expresses regret that his crew were not able to still photograph the peoples they encountered "and we cannot find no subterfuge or tactic to overcome this handicap"). After witnessing one alleged display of 'magic' Davis muses "what could Madison Avenue do with a man like this?" In the first pages of his account of the making of his film Davis claims dramatically that the film was made in secret with (telescopic) cameras "hidden" in dense foliage or up tall trees. However any cursory viewing of the film reveals the dishonesty of these claims: most sequences are professionally shot, with clear and varied perspectives often via tripods. The technical skill involved in the shock film process are also acclaimed, Davis stating in his text: "It took human hands, trained eyes, and creative skills to have brought the fantastic, unusual pictures and exotic sounds of *Brutes and Savages* into significant reality".

Brutes and Savages claims some form of ethnographic/documentary honesty in the project from the outset, firstly by presenting a red text on black screen caption "A Factual Report". Secondly, by noting that the film was made with the support of 'The Institute of Primitive Arts and Cultures', an organization which in reality may or may not exist. Any sense that the viewer be at all convinced by the scientific basis of these claims is promptly dispelled by the next caption which affirms that "all scenes, whether actual or simulated, represent actual truth". A mondo style voice-over invites the viewer to "join the blood and the beauty of the Arthur Davis expedition and his hidden cameras... promoting life in the raw where you can decide who are the brutes and who are the



savages now".

In terms of film style, *Brutes and Savages* remains one of the most psychedelic of the mondo films due in part to its lurid colour schemata (blood is always vibrant crimson) and bewildering use of musical score provided by mondo maestro Riz Ortolani. His musical accompaniment to this exotic-exploration is a funked up, percussive disco beat that lends an even more disjointed and surreal feel to the action. Many of the scenes veer into hallucination aided by the sporadic appearance of Davis himself, bedecked in a series of increasingly camp and ridiculous outfits. Davis is a 'filmmaker' happy to appear in front of the camera dressed in an Armand Denis-style colonial safari outfit if for no other reason than to underline the film's subtitle, "The Arthur Davis Expedition". This is a visual parody, the imagined representation of a 'mondo film director' and so any pretence of authenticity is dispelled as soon as Davis addresses one Nuba chief at length in English.

The sexploitation of mondo makes a spectacular appearance in the film when tribal mating rituals are presented as pornographic spectacle, the camera encroaching perversely upon body after body. Erotic moans and sighs are added to the soundtrack of certain scenes for smutty effect, accompanied further by slow and steamy 'wah wah' funk slithers in the background. Ancient rituals are turned into hypnotic blood and gore spectacles, the mondo proficiency for alchemising gold into excrement. The decapitation of a goat is intensified by Ortolani's rising bongo mayhem on the soundtrack then the animal's sliced-off head is shaken gleefully in front of the lens. Afterwards the young girls of the tribe shake to a *Shaft* style disco funk workout. Astounding.

The claims to 'realism' in the film are made truly ridiculous by a scene depicting a Juba manhood initiation ceremony where fifteen year old boys must safely cross a crocodile infested river. The first boy makes

Previous page **One of the most obviously fabricated mondo sequences committed to celluloid. Crocodile attack in *Brutes & Savages*.**
This page **(left) *Brutes & Savages* book cover; (right) Arthur Davis in colonial safari outfit and an umbrella over his head.**

it over safely but predictably the second is attacked and eaten by crocodiles. "This cursed place smelled of death. It hung in the air like a stagnant pool of putrefied human flesh... the water was as dark as a witch's sinister brew", Davis wrote of the prelude to this scene. After the attack he observed: "Cut! I told the cameraman. I was sick to my stomach". These moving remarks are sadly undercut by the fact that the scene presented in the film is one of the most obviously fabricated mondo sequences committed to celluloid. It is obvious that most of the close up shots of the attack have been filmed in a water tank with dummies. The floating limbs are fifth-rate Tom Savini and the denouement when the reptile emerges with a head clasped in its jaws, rather than invoking sharp shock and horror, instead hurtle the viewer into derision and incredulity. Many of the ritualised fights presented in Africa and South America are poorly staged and terribly acted.

The truly shocking and notorious moments of an otherwise absurd film are centred around the numerous animal killings — by both human hands and non-human. The brutality of these rituals is clear and disturbing: Llamas have their throats cut and hearts ripped out (shown still pulsating long after they have been removed) and are chopped into pieces as a ritualised event. Convincing scenes recording eagle attacks on muskrats, crocodiles on a Jaguar and a lioness pouncing on a rabbit turn the stomach of hardened shock film devotees. Yet the ultimate effect of these moments is to make the staged, fake parts of the film even more absurd.

Arthur Davis, the creator of this film spectacle, concludes: "my ventures with these tribes impressed upon my consciousness that modernized man should better understand these people. That is the purpose of *Brutes and Savages*" a statement scarcely no-one believes.

Davis, seemingly unaware of the offensive philosophy of his film, is a fraudster and his film (and his book) a silly charade — one of the most ridiculous and shocking and amusing mondo films of all time.

Mondo Candido

Dir: Gualtiero Jacopetti & Franco Prosperi
Italy, 1975

□ For years Jacopetti and Prosperi faced accusations of cynicism and destructiveness, their films condemned by most critics for their alleged savage brutality, misanthropy and negativity. Strangely *Mondo Candido*, made fully thirty years ago and to date Jacopetti's final film, is an attempt at refuting such allegations, instead demonstrating Jacopetti's ideology to be the 'optimist' of French author Voltaire's legendary satire of the philosophy of determinism. The film had an unhappy history and production, the result of which Jacopetti and Prosperi became estranged and have remained so ever since (this stems from the fact that external production constraints applied by the producers compromised Jacopetti's methods and he left Prosperi to finish the film). Riz Ortolani was in place and produced one of his finest 'mondo' scores, the lush romanticism elevating the sometimes ponderous action to a new level. For the first time the cinematography lacked the input of Antonio Climati and Benito Frattari. Although the Techniscope

camera work was solid and rendered with the appropriate levels of spectacularity by one of the greats of Italian film history Giuseppe Ruzzolini (director of photography for films as varied and important as Steno's *Piedone a Hong Kong* and Damiano Damiani's *Trinity Is Back Again* (both 1975), Pasolini's *Teorema* aka *Theorem* (1968) and *A Thousand and One Nights* (1974), Polanski's *What?* (1972) Leone's *Giù la testa* aka *A Fistful of Dynamite* (1971), Pontecorvo's *Queimada* aka *Burn!* (1969), Cavani's *Francesco d'Assisi* aka *Francis of Assisi* (1966), Climati's intrusive, fluid multidimensional traits were absent. Jacopetti relinquished control of the film's edit and his beautiful, jarring, shock technique is absent from the smoother exposition of the film as it stands. At first *Mondo Candido* looks like a competent period reconstruction of Voltaire's 1758 story of a naïve innocent blundering through the worst life has to offer. The film opens at the spectacular location of the French medieval Château de Pierrefonds and continues to romp through the Rabelaisian narrative with some nice attention to detail. Yet soon the vaguely titillating contemplation of a medieval romp gives way to a freeform, surrealist, Felliniesque cascade through historical conflict delivered in a mesmerizing collage of film shocks and surprises.

Mondo Candido marks a departure from the documentary style of *Mondo Cane* and

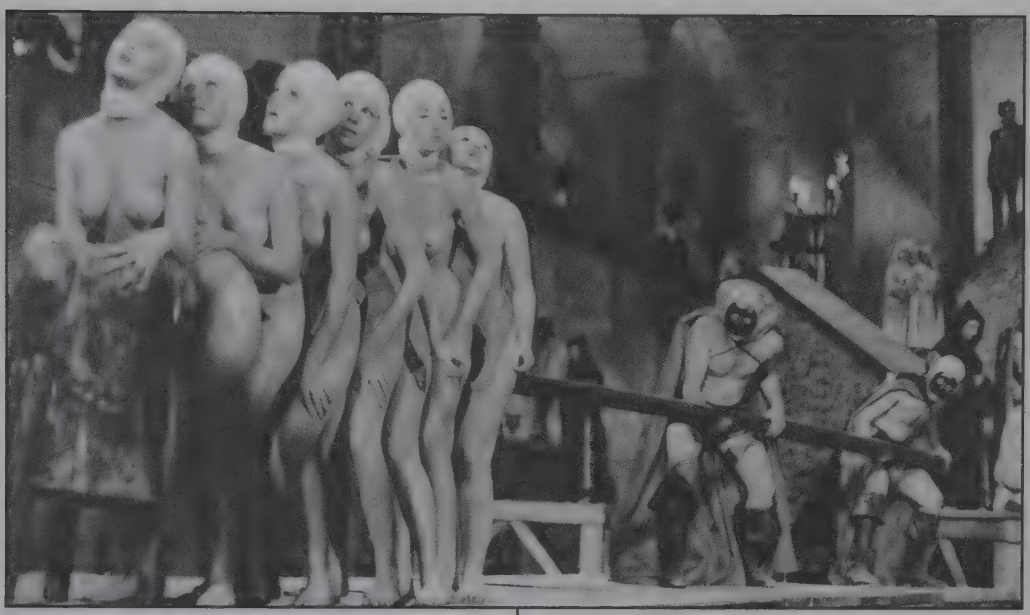
Africa Addio and the quasi-documentary style of *Zio Tom* to a carefully calculated reinterpretation of Voltaire's philosophical and political standpoints. As ever Jacopetti and Prosperi synthesize complex ideas and concepts into surreal film set ups and retell the original stories in their own parodic and sensational way. The eighteenth century historical moments littering Candide's life-spanning narrative are morphed into present day parallel concerns and events; as with *Zio Tom* Jacopetti and Prosperi bring the past into the present and the future, albeit with less of a robust, violent political stance than with the earlier film. It should be no surprise

Previous page **Llamas having their throats cut and hearts ripped out in *Brutes & Savages*.**
This page **Candido engaged in a farce, *Mondo Candido*.**

in a way that Jacopetti turned to Voltaire for inspiration as the art of satire, of which *Candide* is the pre-eminent text, has always been essential to his adventures in film and even further back with his newsreels for Rizzoli's scandalised Italy. Despite this the more explicit, even conventional satire of *Candide* fails considerably more than Jacopetti and Prosperi's earlier films, a fact acknowledged now by everyone who worked on the film. It was never released in the UK or the US.

The film starts with all the requisite signifiers of a romp: servants with wobbling cleavages; a naked statue of atlas who asks Candido (played by English actor Christopher Brown, who also appeared in TV vet drama *All Creatures Great and Small*) to hold the globe for him while he stretches ("how beautiful you are!" rhapsodises Candido), and a tableaux of picnickers in the form of Manet's 'Le Déjeuner sur L'herbe'. A parade of the principal characters: the Baron, Baroness, and their daughter Cunegonde, the love of Candido's life and Pangloss the philosopher and mentor to Candido. Pangloss rehearses Voltaire's words that "this is the best of all possible worlds", an ideological mantra repeated throughout the film (and the book). Amongst the disgusting foods at a grand feast, a collection of grotesque characters emerge: a handmaid with three breasts, a midget chef inside a larger chef's apron pocket, each recalling the excessive world of Fellini's most fantastical cinematic moments. For this, writers Jacopetti and Prosperi's lyrical skills have never deserted them and even here, in their least successful film experiment, moments of genuine tenderness emerge amongst the horror, carnage and death. The portrayal of cherubic Cunegonde, played by British actress Michelle Miller, veers into slow motion, soft-focus reverie, she swings through the air whilst consuming a symbol-of-love apple to Ortolani's beautiful, lush, slow orchestration. This technique recalls, albeit deployed for different means, the equally dreamy Cape Town beach scene from *Africa Addio*. At such moments the old rascals of shockumentary betray their romanticism. Voltaire's original narrative is surreal enough and Jacopetti and Prosperi here use the stylistic straits of contemporary art to create a mystic, otherworldly landscape. Candido's abrupt expulsion form the Thunder-ten-Tronckh castle sees him circle in bewilderment at the wind swept, desert location he has been dumped into, a scene that could be straight out of Jodorowsky's hugely influential (at the time) *El Topo*. This landscape re-emerges twice, firstly in a scene with martyr angels (one of whom looks uncannily like the former Liverpool defender Alan Hansen), and again at the films denouement, this time filled with the worlds' outcasts.

It is at this point that *Mondo Candido* veers into deeper hallucination. A Bulgarian medieval battle turns queer when the opposing army are revealed to be equipped



with twentieth century armaments and their victims transform, upon death, into *Alice in Wonderland*-style packs of flat cards. After a skirmish with an ogre the narrative leaps into an insane version of The Spanish Inquisition, a ghastly perverted tableaux of violence and torture. A 'mach pagan' machine crushes bodies which are then pasted into a giant book; nuns are stripped of all but their coifs and are masturbated en mass along a long greasy pole. Some are sealed into sacks with live dogs and cats — the resulting pain is presented as excruciatingly orgasmic. As Candido is being inexplicably spanked by a bunch of old hags, Cunegonde appears, surveying the scene with some satisfaction before clicking her fingers along to the organ-pop beat that fills the background. The beat group performing this music catch her eye, in particular the singer/bassist 'Attila'. Cunegonde then recognises Candido's bare arse. As before, Jacopetti and Prosperi extrapolate the historical into the fantastical, accentuating the perversion and violence of the imaginary sites through incredible control of the *mis-en-scene*. The appearance of Cacombo, a black slave, reminds viewers of the ridiculous racial types of *Zio Tom* and once Candido has helped him escape the gallows he becomes a trusted if absurd friend. This is not a racist portrayal but another element within a conveyor belt of unreal absurdities running through the entire film effect. The sexual degradation of Cunegonde in Voltaire's original novel is re-imagined through the bizarre representation of a rock group who gang rape her. Cunegonde reveals to Candido that she is no longer virginal and his naïve image of female purity is destroyed. Cunegonde's memories of these vile acts are presented in flashback (Attila the guitarist having sex with her in a top-only 'suit' of armour). Phallic spikes protruding from his outfit are fondled by Cunegonde and she then sits on a mini drawbridge which has dropped from over his groin. Puerile and vulgar but totally in keeping with the transgression of the origi-

Previous page **(from top) A naked statue of atlas asks Candido to hold the globe for him while he stretches; A ghastly perverted tableaux of violence and torture commences, *Mondo Candido*.** This page **Nuns being masturbated en mass, *Mondo Candido*.**

nal text? The powerful cinematic motif of the broken mirrors is revisited (see the climax to *Enter the Dragon*) when Candido and Attila's fight results in wholesale destruction of the glass — and of themselves.

Jacopetti once stated he would have liked to make a film about America. We can only fantasise about how this would have looked, but in *Mondo Candido* some scenes present a glimpse of what this may have been like. Candido and Cacombo escape to the promised land, boarding a ship together with a parade of US heroes past and present (Cristofo Colombo, Uncle Sam, Davy Crockett, Al Capone, Marilyn Monroe, Henry Kissinger) as the narrative swings, once again, seemingly untroubled between the past and the present. At Columbus Day celebrations in New York, Pangloss appears again, this time in the guise of a TV director. His continued pronouncements that "this is still the best of all possible words" resonate with unintentional chill poignancy as we see over his words a long pan of the Manhattan skyline. Topical (for the mid 1970s) conflicts such as the Northern Irish troubles and the war in the Middle East between Israelis and Palestinians are evoked in cartoon fashion (this is the "end of religion" Pangloss states as a car bomb explodes in front of Candido and Carambo). The infamous section from *La Donna nel Mondo* picturing the female regiments of the Israeli army is recalled in a truly stunning scene which begins with sexploitation (women having naked showers) and ends in Peckinpah-style violence as they are gunned down in bloody slow motion by 'Attila's' Arab militia, who are in turn are killed in amidst agonizing, gory carnage. Freeze-frames of these female soldiers depicted in violent pornographic death were used to promote the film.

The utterly surreal finale to the film occurs when all of the characters are reunited (including a now wizened, haggard Cunegonde) in an icy, sand swept wasteland seeking the truth of life from a mysterious guru — the Dervishu. Candido asks him "why does man exist" to which the acousmetric character replies "get stuffed".

Candido has travelled a long way.

After seeing a younger, innocent mirror-image of himself on the opposite bank of the river Candido implores him(self) "No! — don't go that way" but then realises he must let go. He skips off back to the castle and we are back where we started on his metaphysical journey, older if not wiser.

Although considered a failure, artistically and conceptually, *Mondo Candido* still enjoys a strange allure. There are still glimpses of the Jacopetti and Prosperi spirit in this unforgettable overblown, Technicolor indulgence. Many things about the film are indeed gross but as Fellini's corpulent obsessions have somehow withstood the test of time, perhaps Jacopetti and Prosperi's are due a reappraisal.

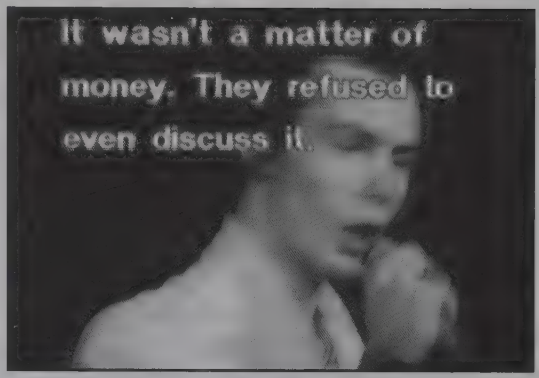
Mr. Mike's Mondo Video

Dir: Michael O'Donoghue
USA, 1979

□ It is not uncommon for Michael O'Donoghue's shockumentary spoof, *Mr Mike's Mondo Video,* to be described as one of the worst films ever made. And yet this bizarre addendum to the mondo cannon clearly demonstrates a deep, if not profound, understanding of the aesthetics and motivations of mondo filmmaking. O'Donoghue was a writer for the American satire magazine *National Lampoon* before becoming one of the founder members of the legendary TV show that gave birth to a generation of American comics *Saturday Night Live* (O'Donoghue in fact is credited with uttering the first ever words on the first ever edition of the show). *Mr Mike's Mondo Video* is a satire in the reckless spirit of the aforementioned comedy origins and one suspects the criticism of the film largely stems from the rough, emetic ethos of the entire production. The film is part celebration of mondo and part critique — albeit a critique as tasteless as one might expect from an alternative comedy veteran studded with cameos from the director's peers (Dan Ackroyd, Bill Murray, Deborah Harry and Carrie Fisher). O'Donoghue intensifies the more dubious aspects of mondo filmmaking to sick proportions always refracted through a comedic lens.

The celebratory and homage style quality of the film is clear from the outset. The by now familiar pre-credit rolling, white-on-black text screen exposition/warning, in this instance states that:

"The film you are about to see is shocking and repugnant beyond belief. It contains scenes of disturbing sexual practices and mindless violence. If older people with heart conditions are watching, or persons under psychiatric care, make them sit close so they won't miss anything. Do not allow children of an impressionable age to leave the room. If they are sleeping wake them up, slap them.



Give them hot coffee."

The images that accompany the subsequent sequence are similarly parodic, featuring a rapid montage of shock shots intertwined with sexual images, an inventory of which jolts the recall of any serious mondo aficionado: tribal ritual dances, disrobing women, stoned rockers, transgressives, Japanese women with parasols, a chicken (it turns out that these scenes are taken from the sequences of the film itself). The music meanwhile is a mordant, ugly synth drone in the style of Ortolani's 'savage rite' cue from the *Cannibal Holocaust* score. All of this in reply to the voice-over query: "What

Previous page **Female regiments of the Israeli army, *Mondo Candido*.** This page **(from top) A silent clip of Sid Vicious ("a mondo kind of guy") performing My Way, and Mr Mike himself, *Mr Mike's Mondo Video*.**

is Mondo?"

After a brief introduction by Mr. Mike himself ("welcome to a world where the bizarre is commonplace and the commonplace is bizarre"), Joe Meek's haunting Telstar melody appears accompanied by a set of ridiculous joke lyrics sung partly in Italian (allegedly) by Italian-America crooner Julius LaRosa (singer of novelty hit Eh, Cumpari), presenting us with a daft, if near-perfect, pastiche of the mondo predilection for sentimental musical framing. The film effectively incorporates key mondo traits such as the use of a swinging sixties underscore to herald a new location, the suggested (and usually simulated) use of hidden cameras to film illicit scenes (in this case a joke about 'Italian cine-journalists'), insertion of grainy and shaky 8mm footage to represent 'reality', the inclusion of fluxus-style 'art film' segments as a subject for ridicule, scenes 'deleted by network' and even a 'cargo cult' parody at the climax of the film (where the natives collect the discarded waste of American popular culture) which just predates Jamie Uys' *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980) and doubles the viewer's mondo kicks by mimicking the bloody POV decapitation conclusion to *Cannibal Holocaust*. Even the *Mondo Cane* font is replicated for the end title frames. The free-form nature of *Saturday Night Live* occasionally emerges to shatter any mondo ethic and reveals a peculiarly American translation of the Italian mondo film style. In this take on shockumentary the inclusion of any punk sub-cultural activity is worthy of being described as 'mondo' and so we witness the surreal performance of Klaus Nomi, who mimes to an aria from Saint-Saëns' *Samson and Delilah* dressed as a space mutant, Sid Vicious' rendition of My Way is screened (without the sound as permission was refused by Paul Anka's licensing company): Vicious, who had just died of a heroin overdose, is described by O'Donoghue as a "mondo kind of guy", Root Boy Slim and the Sex Change Band in full flow, and so on.

Even weirder is the random inclusion of 'out there' art in the form of short and cheap animation sequences; some found footage of an early nudie Cine Art featurette *Uncle Si and the Sirens*; the Thomas Edison footage of the electrocution of an elephant, infamous as an early example of shockumentary footage. The inclusion of a failed film sequence *Crowd Scene, Take One*, where the mechanics of trying to construct an elaborate cinematic scenario are laid bare, is equally odd.

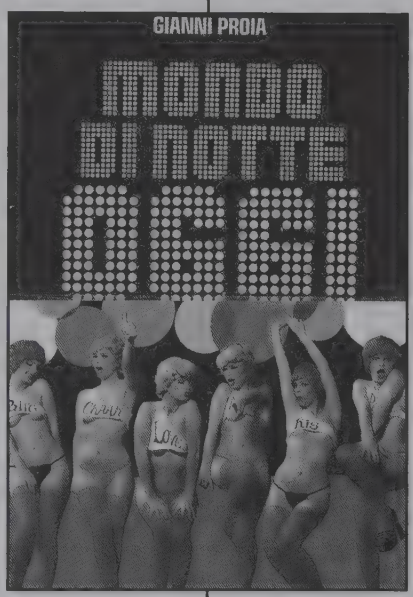
To be truthful, the shocks in *Mr Mike's Mondo Video*, after the troubling opening segment on an Amsterdam 'Swimming Club for Cats' (where cats are really launched into a swimming pool and left to desperately scramble back to the side) are puerile and tame in comparison with the genuine shocks of the more extreme examples in this chapter. Nevertheless, O'Donoghue, who died of a cerebral haemorrhage in 1994, has captured some of the mondo spirit effectively and with some humour. In its celebration of the freaky, gross and the sleazy *Mr Mike's Mondo Video* neatly summarizes the place mondo films occupy in American cinema history: the trashcan.

Mondo di Notte Oggi

Dir: Gianni Proia
Italy, 1975

□ In this strange and disturbing film Gianni Proia, creator of the *Mondo di Notte* series, revisits the mondo oeuvre with one of most reflexive, post-modern contributions to the genre. After a ten year absence from the subgenre, Proia's return to the mondo film also marks the return of some of the key figures in his earlier trilogy, most notably the French cabaret/burlesque star Coccinelle who opens the film with a modern interview in her 'dressing room'. She is now a flabby, faded ex-star (who was never a recognised star to begin with) being confined to appearances in second rate cinematic burlesques, her jaded remarks and sad attempts at exuding

a whiff of glamour standing as a metaphor for the decline of the entertainment tradition of which she was once a key member. The decline of the burlesque is perhaps the overarching message of this film, although it is unlikely that Proia originally intended this. If the film was conceived in the grand mondo tradition of celebrating the shocking and the bizarre, then that is not how it can be read today (the inclusion of weak TV variety act Rod Hull and Emu, for British viewers particularly, illustrates how desperate the search for shocks had become). *Mondo di Notte Oggi* includes a parade of modernist night entertainments, some of which are vaguely interesting, but the overall impression left by the film is that this particular approach to mondo filmmaking had now run its course. At least that is how it looks today.



The film offers a reflexive (film about filmmaking) approach to mondo from the outset as we open with a rerun of the footage from the earlier *Mondo di Notte* series of Coccinelle crooning in French. This cuts, cruelly (and certainly without her knowing) to shots of her now bearing a striking resemblance to a homogenised version of the later, and grotesque, incarnations of Diana Dors or Anita Ekberg: deluded, over made-up and bitter. Proia's camera (provided by mondo great Benito Frattari) travels over her body, lingering on her breasts just as it did ten years previously but any eroticism is lost. "Ce'st la merde" Coccinelle remarks of the 'mondo di notte oggi', at the point in which the liberation and excitement of the cultural and social revolutions of the 1960s, turned ugly, violent and depraved.

There then follows a brilliant, freaky title sequence where footage from the original *Notte* films is filtered through psychedelic posterisations, various strippers and singers such as the American troupe The Platters, morph into scorched abstraction, in the same way that when things got scary in *Dr Who*, the picture careered into inversion. The colour schemata is wonderful, lurid and exciting, while the music provided by Gianni Oddi (an Italian sax legend responsible for the riffs on films as diverse as *Last Tango in Paris* and *The Legend of 1900*) runs from gentle soft bossa and jazz vibes to the original *Notte* theme, An Old Cow Hand, delivered in the style of The Mike Sammes' Singers. The whole sequence is a kaleidoscope of distant memories updated for the hallucinogenic epoch, misguided, weird and unforgettable. It's arguably the best moment in the film.

The cynical, reactionary attitude towards social progression (particularly Northern European) that is found sprinkled throughout the classic period Italian mondos, is continued and exacerbated manifold. In fact the film opens properly in Sweden, a country still, ten years later, the target for attacks on any over-liberal approach to modern living. A serious-looking (hence stereotypical) Swedish family 'unit' tuck into a meal while pornographic scenes flicker away on the family TV screen behind. Eventually the boy leaves the table to sit and take in the scenes. Neither his parents, nor Grandparents seemed remotely concerned and carry on masticating. The theorem, that Scandinavian liberalism still reaches irresponsible levels, is undercut when the porn is interrupted by Rod Hull and Emu delivering a ridiculous innuendo filled 'comic sketch', enough to evaporate the fiercest libido and more redolent of the British neu-

rosis over sexuality and eroticism. Much of the film is devoted to the more unusual sex bars of North America, firstly heterosexual entertainments, then homosexual variants, bondage, sado-masochism and fisting, the clichéd, conservative image of gay living. The exhibitionist display of New York dance clubs of this era caught Proia's imagination, in particular those sites where nudity, sex and drugs played out with hedonistic (pre-AIDS) abandon ("keep it in your pants" one sign asks), propelled by the fast, disco soundtrack of Gloria Gaynor and Esther Phillips. Interviews, always hilarious, with moustachioed club owners punctuate the vista of wicked abandonment, their mercenary, free-market philosophising strangely worrying; one can almost smell the burn out. The film manages to cram in possibly more nudity than any other 'proper' mondo film, reflecting an era when even 'high' art stage performances, in one instance ballet, were filled with bare flesh. A pointless piece of Parisian 'theatre', depicting a man's sex obsessions and frustrations end up with full nudity and simulated sex acts. The attitude towards sex in the film is unremittingly puerile and the viewer is left to decide whether this reflects childish Latin immaturity or a satire on warped Anglo-Saxon repression. Few would argue that the entertainments on offer at the Nevada resort of Las Vegas amply fulfil mondo credentials, the disturbing eeriness of a supposed palace of fun poorly masking the ugly face of capitalism run riot. There are many scenes of Vegas acts from erotic fanciness (naked women in water tanks with dolphins, nude full-scale MGM musical tributes), to disturbing circus simulations: trapeze, dog shows and the monstrously camp Siegfried and Roy (where an urge to witness real death-by-lion is almost excruciating). The slickness of the Vegas productions and that of Stockholm impresario Ulrich Geismar's 'lesbian' mirror act contrasts violently with porn baron Paul Raymond's totally un-sexy London farce *Pyjama Tops*. This stultifying combination of men in blazers and dirty old men cavorting with naked young girls in a middle class split-level apartment merely stimulates a desire to nod off. Throughout the entire film we are transported back to the ghosts of the original *Notte* cycle, the effect of which is usually to reinforce the notion that nocturnal enticements have become more sordid and desperate. But one contrast between the 'old' and 'new' startles: the memorable and disturbing Shinto manhood ritual, where a throbbing mass of young Japanese compete violently and dangerously for a stick symbolising their passage towards masculinity, is replaced with a tender and erotic massage by first one and then several young women as a route for the more modern Japanese male towards sexual fulfilment. To compound how times have changes from the all-male ritual of *Ecco*, a woman is shown enjoying the attentions of two male masseurs. From the sacred to the profane by way of the orgasm. Proia attempts a lighter ending by inserting a Benny Hill-style scene around a 'fountain of desire' where a man wishes his wife away to be replaced by a sexy girl, who then wishes away the man for a hunk, who then takes a fancy for the man before and the wife returns again (recalling Proia's earlier bizarre quasi-mondo feature *Realta' Romanzesca*), but this fails to lift the now jaded spirits of the viewer.

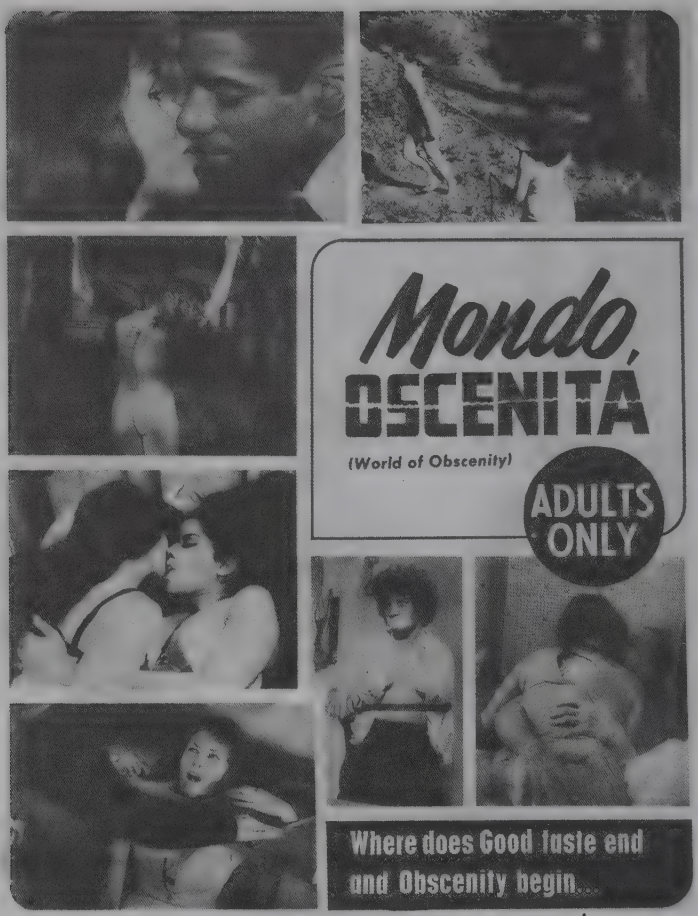
Reflexivity makes another appearance as a silly act, where a piano player narrates the story of a young man's search for love in a new city, beginning with slide-show illustrations of his encounters and ends with the couple emerging on the stage before making love on a bed 'for real'. But *Mondo di Notte Oggi* is far from a conceptual art film. Rather it is a gloriously grotesque update of mondo from the age of innocence to the age of contempt, the film's sadness, perversity and ugliness resembles a signpost to the horror-show mondos of the 1980s. Proia is a very good mondo filmmaker and he may have intended this. With mondo one never knows. Whatever, *Mondo do Notte Oggi* offers up a vision of a future haunted by the past.

Voyeurism & Sexuality in the Mondo Film

"he used a camera like most men use a woman"

VOYEURISM — the pleasure of watching others perform acts — has long been an important aspect of the mondo aesthetic. From the earliest incarnations of the 'classic' period (1959–1975) where directors offered audiences a 'peepshow' on nightclub and burlesque acts to the hunting and cannibal mondos that came later, where what we see through the camera-gun becomes pathological, the deployment of the camera lens as a gateway to the forbidden and the taboo has been critical. While the association between cinematic apparatus and voyeurism is as old as cinema itself, deeply enshrined in fact within the basic act of recording things as they happen, it is within the mondo genre that this association finds one of its richest manifestations. Other genres have exploited voyeurism effectively: horror, the most notable, knowingly; others, such as ethnographic filmmaking, accidentally. Perhaps significantly well known feature films dealing with voyeurism (*Psycho*, *Peeping Tom*, *Blowup*) emerged together with the golden age of mondo (it would be hard at least for Antonioni, being at the forefront of an Italian new wave, to have ignored the impact of the probing eye of the shockumentary trend). The greater flexibility offered by new lightweight

Antonio Climati



cameras with powerful zoom lenses and vivid colour processes then was aligned with an explosion of experimentation and creativity. Thus the 'golden age' of European cinema was that of mondo too. Mondo films become the visual manifestation of our worst fears and desires.

The etymology of the word voyeurism is simply that of the French verb *voir* (to see). Yet manifestations of voyeurism — particularly in cinematic terms — cannot be separated from sexuality and its expression through eroticism and pornography. In many ways mondo films *amplify* the message of better known and respected discourses (see above) on the voyeurism of the male gaze and have often been those used to exemplify the troubling relationship between the power of the active watcher (male) and powerlessness of the passive watched (female). Susan Keppeler in her book *The Pornography of Representation* invents the "women-zoo peep-show" where women are now visually represented by cameras as animals were previously. Keppeler notes that "the reproduction of women in images makes woman-images ever more exotic and remote" certainly a crucial element of mondo 'sexys' such as *La Donna nel Mondo*, *Mondo Oscenita* and the *Mondo di Notte* series. Her statement that "the cultural space of women, captured and framed in images is one big show world" could easily be mutated into a tag line for a mondo film. For feminist writers and critics, cinematic voyeurism reproduces a patriarchal society where this pleasure in looking (made by men for a male audience) appears in a most lucid and powerful way. Laura Mulvey, in her very famous essay on the visual pleasures of film, whilst noting in *Blowup* the importance of the main character's abilities as a 'photojournalist' ("a maker of stories, a captor of images") observes that film's multi-perspective look makes it more effective than "striptease, theatre shows etc." and so too accidentally articulates a key mondo aesthetic. The voyeuristic tendency of mondo has been likened to that of a peepshow with all of the grubby associations that form of visual entertainment offers. In their book *Grindhouse* Eddie Muller and Daniel Faris describe the "hidden camera" as a "vital element" of mondo films but go further to evidence this as being a key aspect of the "fakery" of many mondo sequences. The eroticism of mondo where strippers and sexy nightclub acts are recorded and displayed is thus pseudo-eroticism — a form of porno-kitsch; the viewer's curiosity for the forbidden is being exploited by the mondo director (or more often producer) in a parody of

Grand Guignol style. The uneasy POV gaze of mondo films contributes negatively then for some to parity in representation. As if to reinforce the link between shockumentary film and sex, mondo films featured regularly in adult film magazines of the era (most notably *Cinema X* and *Continental Cinema*) where nudity and sex were permissible as part of a liberatory ideology.

Cultural attitudes to voyeurism and sexuality, as we shall see, mean that this titillating dimension of mondo films is one of the most derided aspects. Yet these negative associations are countered by Amos Vogel for whom voyeurism is an integral, even subversive, aspect of film form. For Vogel "the primitive taboo remains with us... as we watch scenes of death, intercourse or birth in reverential abandon, our silence is witness to the thrilling guilt of the voyeur/transgressor (to see what one has no right to see), coupled with fear and punishment". Vogel acknowledges the powerful effects of voyeurism in cinema as a way to confront and explore taboos. In his examination of these taboos Vogel articulates, again accidentally, or at least subconsciously, the mondo aesthetic. When he notes that "particularly traumatic are sudden and unexpected transitions from innocuous to taboo images" for example he could be beautifully describing the 'Jacopetti effect'. Such 'trauma' is precisely that which Jacopetti was aiming for through his selection process and editing style — the 'shock cut' as he called it. Another American critic Parker Tyler reinforces the association between voyeurism and taboo in the creative act: "the whole concept of voyeurism implies that reality contains certain taboo spheres — and especially where the naked eye is concerned; where *seeing* is the same as *believing*... there is nothing like the naked eye for satisfying both curiosity about facts and the sense of pleasure". These critiques value voyeurism as an essential part of a cinema that challenges and threatens to be located within both underground film and commercial cinema. The voyeuristic tendency is thus elevated from that of 'guilty pleasures' to 'subversive act'. Therefore although mondo films are not often featured in discussions of cinematic voyeurism, a closer examination of some key examples reveals that they are in fact luminous exemplars of this important aspect of film art.

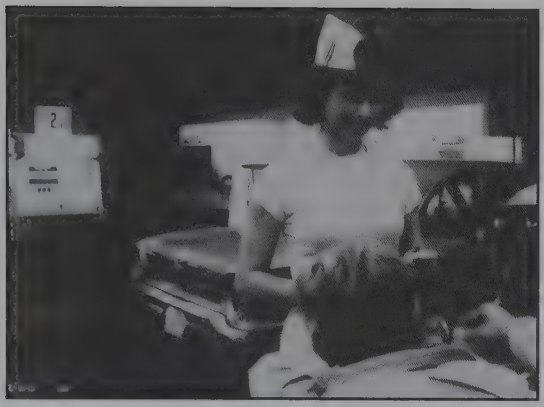
La Donna nel Mondo

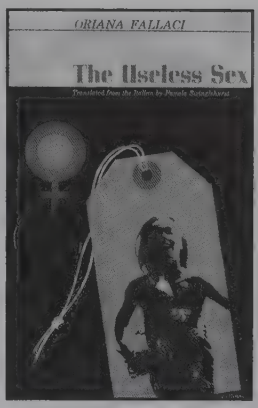
[Women of the World]
Dir: Gualtiero Jacopetti, Paolo Cavara, Franco Prosperi
Italy, 1962

□ At first glance Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi's third feature looks like the ultimate voyeuristic cine-voyage. The film was marketed, particularly in the UK and US (the home of sexploitation kitsch) as a kaleidoscope of saucy pin-up views of

This page ***Mondo di Notte.***

the numerous manifestations of 'women of the world' and the entire concept today looks tired and sexist. Jacopetti now tries to disown or dismiss the project, claiming that the studio and his producer (Rizzoli) tied him and Prosperi to it as part of a three-picture deal. To make matters worse the film was haunted with personal misfortune, indifference and bad vibes, ample reasons for all involved to try now to refute the project. Yet behind the sleaze and misjudgements was a serious journalistic project — at least in its inception. The idea for the project dates back some years before *Mondo Cane* when Prosperi devised the notion for a film documentary about 'love in the world'. Although this was never realised the concept came alive again when Rizzoli tried to create a film project in collaboration with controversial Italian feminist journalist and writer Oriana Fallaci. Fallaci had written an account, based on travels with the photographer Duiolio Pallottelli, of the changing role of women across Asia, the Far East, the Pacific Islands and North America. As both Jacopetti and Fallaci are famed for their extrovert personalities a collaborative film project was never likely to succeed — indeed a meeting with Rizzoli at Cannes was aborted. So Prosperi's original scheme was resurrected to become *La Donna nel Mondo*. It's easy to assume that the film would have been less squalid, more 'feminist' had Fallaci remained onboard. Yet certain sections of the film do bear a resemblance to serious reportage and are at least admirable for Jacopetti and Prosperi's trademark filmic talents: sardonic-poetic commentary; clever editing, beautiful cinematography; gorgeous use of music (Ortolani and Oliviero again). Moreover, Fallaci's own book about 'women of the world' *The Useless Sex* seems now almost as dated. The sexual politics of the book, containing the notion, for example, of a Miss Universe competition being a liberating concept, are ill conceived by today's standards (Fallaci's dislike of Muslim traditions,

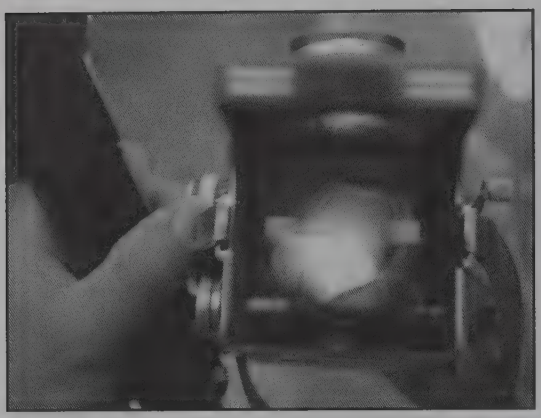




recently scandalously unearthed in books and articles published in Italy, makes an early appearance in the book). Fallaci's own observations about women are privileged and frequently ornamental. In addition the concept of the roving camera eye was to be developed in more offensive and lame ways by American mondo directors (see *Mondo Freudo*). All of this is not to defend a largely unsuccessful film. It is quite drawn out and the sequences are not compiled as astutely as the team's other efforts. The principal problem was that most of the material in the film was outtakes from *Mondo Cane*. This is made abundantly clear when a sequence on Chinese women covering in white clothes to avoid turning "bright yellow" in the sun can be recognised in publicity material for *Mondo Cane*. The concept is thinner — indeed most mondos that divert from the global concept struggle to be engaging. One would expect the infamous (to Northern Europeans) Italian notion of the *bella figura* be more prominent in the film but its appearance is relatively modest. In fact the sexism of the film is more exaggerated in the English language versions particularly the version where the voice-over was provided by Peter Ustinov famed for his 'wit' in parodying peoples of the world excused by way of the fact that Ustinov declared on many occasions to be 'one of them'. Innuendo too, a British speciality, emerges often in Ustinov's telling of the film. The credit sequence for the Ustinov version of the film, a camera monitoring a woman's behind as she hurries through an airport lounge, states that we are about to see women of the world "as viewed by Peter Ustinov". As if to emphasise the leering nature of this the on-screen titles then sashay in rhythm with the woman's rear movements; a brilliant and innovative piece of kinetic film sexism.

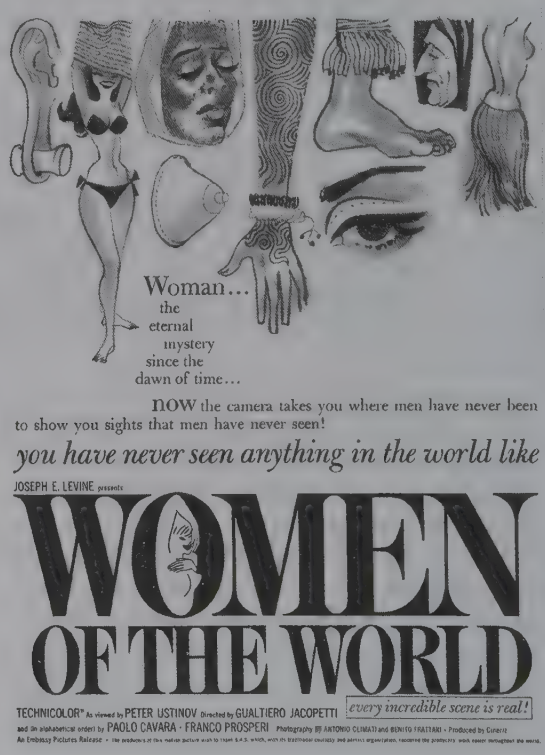
The rest of the above mentioned credit sequence is cleverly devised. Set in an airport lounge, then, in the early 1960s, a site of great promise, liberation and multiculturalism (we see this illustrated with a parade of ethnically diverse women: Japanese, Indian, African; a Hawaiian woman greets the passengers of one flight with a carefully staged dance). Some female film stars appear including Sophia Loren (edited out of the English version). As the SAS plane (a Jacopetti/Prosperi favourite) becomes air bound it suddenly freezes and some text informs us that the film is dedicated to Belinda Lee, the British actress and companion of Jacopetti who helped shape his image as a jet setting playboy and Latin Lover par excellence (this too is missing from the English version). The scene is set then for a Phillias Fogg-style foray into the mysteries of the female species. There is plenty of of-its-time voyeurism in *La Donna nel Mondo*: we peek at members of a female regiment of the Israeli army undressing after harsh training. The titillation fears of the preceding sequence when a Roman military corps is distracted from its march by girls in the crowd (their sideways looks are frozen on screen) are evidently justified. The real

This page **Prosperi buys gas in *La Donna nel Mondo*; Oriana Fallaci's own book about 'women of the world', *The Useless Sex*.**



efforts of some of the female soldiers are mocked, slyly: when one of them stutters over a climbing structure the music stutters with her and shifts from being militaristic to 'feminine' sounding.

European sexual behaviour is also derided especially the various Riviera cults that have emerged: all-naked beaches and the Cannes Film Festival featuring prominently (an inspired moment at Cannes is when we see the reflected image of a curvy would-be starlet reflected in a man's sunglasses). In California girls try to eke out a living pumping gas (to a man who looks remarkably like Franco Prosperi) while they wait to be discovered by movie moguls. "That's the law of the cinema" warns Jacopetti as we visit Milton Green's photo studio "chop up 100 women just to create one". There are the usual lyrical moments: lovers in cars on a Californian coastline remind you how the cinematography for the Jacopetti-Prosperi pictures is at times immensely beautiful.



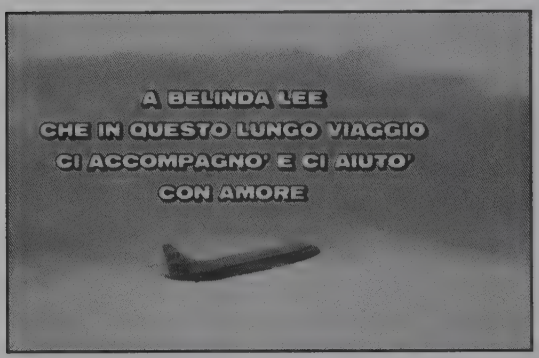
The peep show hidden camera is shown several times and for disparate reasons. Firstly, to aid authenticity: in the 'women in the windows' of Hamburg (the camera is hidden in a laundry van); the Bedouin women who scramble to recover used artillery shells in battles on the Moroccan/Algerian border (we see Climati behind the enormous tele-

lens and Prosperi issuing orders); the promiscuity of co-eds in a Stockholm apartment block is spied upon *Rear Window*-style from an fortuitous "observation post"; meanwhile the illegitimate children born out of these loose sexual morals are photographed thanks again to "our telephoto lens"; then the Thalidomide case of Belgian Suzanne Vanderput who killed her baby out of sympathy. Here the crew are seen trying to find "some shadow in her face that betrays her true state of mind". Secondly, as comment: in Tokyo a naked girl can be photographed by tourists from any angle. The scopophilic irony of us watching them, via the film camera, watching her is not lost on the directors. Finally, for amusement: we see Frattari filming the Chinese beach bathing girls hiding in a turret swinging round an enormous phallic telephoto.

The real social strides and achievements made by women are treated with a certain amount of disrespect. Jacopetti and Prosperi, unlike Fallaci, compare the running of large corporations in the US by women (the treasury, the Bank of New York) to the running of a domestic home (such an ideology was exemplified by the Thatcherism project in 1980s Britain). Likewise, moves towards homosexuality, in the shape of Parisian lesbian and gay bars are dismissed as, respectively, "a pathetic parody of men one can only view with sadness" and a "ridiculous attempt at negating women". The shocks, despite Jacopetti and Prosperi's reputation, are few in this film. The most notable is a clever cut from a girl being ritually tattooed in Borneo to plastic surgery in the west where women have the skin on their faces 'removed' so that a fresher, younger face can emerge later. The women's faces, as they recover in the beds of the private clinic, are a bloody mess. This sequence looks fake but the jolt between the two scenes, aided by sudden a super-fast avant-jazz burst is real enough. Jacopetti and Prosperi are masters of the mordant finale. This time we are at Lourdes where thousands sacrifice everything to come and be cured by the 'White Lady'. The spiritual and emotional intensity, the assemblage of which is a true and difficult cinematic art, whilst at odds which much of the rest of the film, is moving and thought-provoking. An interesting insertion is the record of a town in Southern Italy where traditional sexual values are still enforced by, according to the local gravestone inscriptions, penalty of death.

Mondo films, particularly the sexual aspect of them, arguably generated a particular kind of sensibility, which paved the way for changing this kind of strict Catholic morality.

Previous page ***La Donna nel Mondo* as viewed by Peter Ustinov.** This page **Jacopetti with Belinda Lee, to whom *La Donna nel Mondo* (in its Italian incarnation at least) is dedicated.**



The sexual freedoms, urged on by an interest in Freudian models, was accelerated by the acceptance of films like *La Donna nel Mondo*. Whatever its other faults this, for liberals at least, partially redeems the film...?

Mille Peccati... Nessuna Virtù

[The Wages of Sin]
Dir: Sergio Martino
Italy, 1969

□ The main thrust behind Sergio Martino's mangled contribution to the mondo cannon *Mille Peccati...* is exemplified brilliantly by its English translation — *Wages of Sin* (*Mondo Sex* is the other, cruder, alternative title). The film is narrated by mondo stalwart Edmund Purdom and his voice-over is a superb, at times hilarious, exhibition of mondo moralising. The main premise of the film is sound enough: to critically analyse, via the documentary film mode, the rapidly increasing exploitation of sexuality in modern consumer capitalism. The concept of 'love' under market economics, the director points out, has become devalued, mechanised, standardised and estranged from real human experience. Hence: 'a thousand sins... and no virtues'. The film presents the standard forty or so sequences of evidence to answer the question posed by the narrator at the beginning: "does love pay?" Martino made several contributions to the mondo and pseudo-mondo cannons including *America Cosi Nuda Violenta* (1970) and *La Montagna del Dio Cannibale* (1978) but was better known for the creation of *giallo* thrillers and erotic comedies. *Mille Peccati...* was his first feature film. Working with the same excellent cinematographer Floriano Trenker, who does a passable mimic of Antonio Climati's intrusive, pushy style, Martino's skill in the depiction of sexualised images is clear straight off. For the credit sequence the camera swirls around a naked, gaudily painted female dancer flexing her body in a drug-induced hypnosis. A throbbing psychedelic beat accentuates the scene. The familiar ambiguity of mondo sexuality is thus 'laid bare': the film is simultaneously a celebration and a critique of the cinematic sexualised image — both titillating and terrifying. The moral confusion of the piece is emphasised by the way in which we are directed from, on the one hand, scenes roundly condemning the commoditisation of sex (via factories producing sex aids, sex shops, sex clubs) to other scenes observing, 'anthropologically', changing sexual behaviour (gay marriages, homosexual clubs, free sex, love relationships within the church). Martino expects audiences to marvel at the abundant social and cultural shifts he has recorded whilst at the same time lamenting the decadence of such practices and phenomenon.

Despite this some of the segments arguing against the commodification of sexuality are well executed. One scene describing the development of a Swedish club for the hiring of young men by middle-aged females ends

with the tart observations that "the woman always pays". The exploding Swedish sex industry is a regular target in this film. As the narrator laments that "love is indeed dead" the practices of a factory producing and supplying sex aids by mail order is described as "eternal love making — churned out over and over again". The notion of the production of seven-inch vinyl records of sex sounds — 'pornophones' (these also appear in Scattini's *Svezia, Inferno e Paradiso*) and the hi-tech match-making of an electric dating machine are similarly despised. The film is apparently an examination of sin and so gluttony is portrayed in true mondo gastro-style with close-up shots of fat people stuffing food into their faces accompanied by a soundtrack of burps, belches and gurgles. Modern art meanwhile — a long-standing mondo target — also contributes to these 'wages of sin' as German painter Kurt Rumbhild (a made-up name) creates paintings by pouring pigment onto his canvases while his model couples have sex — "it's productivity that counts" remarks Purdom. At the end of the sequence, as two women enter the studio, we are informed, although not shown, that Rumbhild is about to create "his widely acclaimed 'Sapphic Love'". Mondo modesty anyone?

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the age of the creators of this film (Martino was thirty-one when *Mille Peccati...* was made) the strongest condemnation is reserved for the practices of European youth cultures — in particular those that are anti-conformist. In these sequences sex and drugs are 'problems' and those groups dedicated to alternative lifestyles are rounded upon with particular venom. The conservatism of this stance becomes apparent when communal

Previous page **Scenes edited out of the English version of *La Donna nel Mondo*: Sophia Loren and the tribute to Belinda Lee.** This page ***Mille Peccati... Nessuna Virtù*, classic era Italian mondo.**

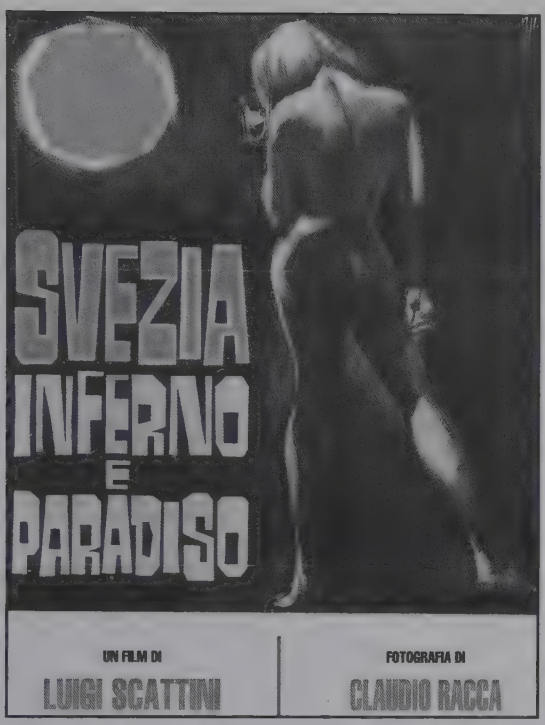
living, free love and drug taking are mapped against so-called 'normal' existences. Young couples, for example, acting in porno films to earn money, are presented as being incapable of answering the narrator's question: "what's the difference between a prostitute and what you do?" To ensure that the point is not lost the voices of the characters are dubbed in a 'thick' *Eurotrash* style. "Here, then, is the point reached by the generation of today" he despairs finally as we exit the scene. The narrator similarly describes the practices of German "morphine" addicts as being "a shortcut to happiness; a slow suicide which kills the taste for life long before the brain flakes into imbecility". "The masses" on the other hand "have the courage to make something of their lives". Meanwhile, over scenes of an avant-garde "nude-in" at the Amsterdam Paradiso theatre, the narrator observes that "The Naked Ape has always been a vaudeville attraction". The deeply pessimistic ending to the film circles around a British family who openly share pot and are said to be seeking the space where "dream reality and living reality interfuse". Prophecies of doom are thrown back onto the audience with the challenge: "do they care? Do you? Think about it children: we are all in your hands". The family disappear into the grey London morning.

Mille Peccati... is, like many 'classic' era Italian mondo films, well executed, colourful, crisply edited and entertaining. The film is an important contribution to the sexual aspect of the mondo film, rendered with much greater gusto than the American efforts in this sphere (see *Mondo Freudo*). One can see from this film why Purdom was favoured so much as the voice of English mondo. His narration is hugely varied, expressive and like Ustinov Purdom delights in 'admiring' pretty young girls and aping the accents of foreigners: here Germans, French and British are all mimicked with an indecent lack of respect. The moral ambiguity of mondo films was never more evident. And this, depending on your view, is either inspiring or idiotic.

Svezia, Inferno e Paradiso

[Sweden Heaven and Hell]
Dir: Luigi Scattini
Italy, 1967

□ Vilgot Sjöman, the director of *I Am Curious* his controversial portrayal of late 1960s Sweden, once explained that his intention in making the film was to "puzzle a foreign audience with it (Sweden), saying, at once, that it is both very active and open, but that you still find a lot of sexual difficulties". This paradox lies at the heart of Luigi Scattini's less arty but no less powerful mondo portrait of the Scandinavian country and is expressed lucidly in the film's title: Sweden: Heaven and Hell? The film is unusual in that it focuses on the behaviours of one nation only — mondo films up until that point had almost always suggested a global view on events. Why did Scattini choose Sweden? He, after all, had completed several more conventional mondo films before embarking upon *Svezia...* these being *L'Amore Primitivo*



(1964) and *Sexy Magico* (1963) and would go on later to produce (under a pseudonym) *Vizi Segreti della Donna nel Mondo* with Jacopetti's other lensman Benito Frattari, *Questo Sporco Mondo Meraviglioso* (both 1971) and the witchcraft/magic mondo classic *Angeli bianchi... Angeli Neri* (see chapter seven) — an output that easily makes him one of the most productive mondo directors. Scattini elected Sweden because for most non-Scandinavian Europeans (and Northern Americans) Sweden in the late 1960s embodied a nation practically and intimately engaged with various liberal socio-cultural revolutions in the psychological and sexual sphere. Many of the new freedoms of this epoch were represented vividly in the film. The sleeve notes for the original soundtrack LP remarks: "The documentary tries to compare the two most evident aspects of current Swedish society: prosperity and the inner anxiety which ensues from it". Thus Sweden, for an Italian shock director, offered a great many rich psycho-sexual audio-visual opportunities — a desirable and debatable vision of the future for 'less advanced' Europeans. Scattini, moreover, is a highly skilled director and the pace and breadth of the images created for *Svezia...* though lurid, is impressive and engaging, building impressively on Enrico Altavilla's original collection of newspaper articles-turned-book. The soundtrack by Piero Umiliani is masterful, an essential feature, with its blend of jazz, pop and song, of the film's identity (see appendix ii). The narration by legendary Italian actor Enrico Maria Salerno, no stranger to contemporary cinematic sexuality is modest yet expressive — a rival to Sibaldi (see *Mondo Cane*) (Edmund Purdom supplied the English narration). These qualities are sadly lost in the cheap video dupes circulating today. The film opens with the by now common 'statement of authenticity'. Except here Scattini is candid with the audience: "all of the scenes in this film were taken from real life or are based on real events" a more honest reworking of the famous opening statement from *Mondo Cane*. Scattini, like Jacopetti is a brilliant film editor. The forty or so scenes in *Svezia...* mostly end abruptly with a kick but not so that the viewer is distracted. This technique, only valid in the most skilled mondo directors, effectively aids the effect of cruising from one contrasting element to another but also provides the 'shock' element critical to the best mondo moments, whether for humour or for shock purposes (and befits a director of more than a dozen *giallo* film works). Examples of this are abundant: a 'lesbian' club in Stockholm ends with two women embracing in an erotic kiss. As the camera closes in voyeuristically we are jolted with a sudden and extreme close up of an aging Salvation Army volunteer. The cold shock of the image juxtaposition is augmented by the synchronised switch from a pulsating, sexy beat groove to the jaunty but staid

Previous page **"Love is indeed dead" in a scene from *Mille Peccati... Nessuna Virtù*.**

waltz of an accordion. The abrupt contrast between the 'new' and the 'old' could not be better realised. This central paradoxical theme of the film is underlined towards the end when a sequence depicting a labyrinthine underground atomic bunker complete with firestorm practice runs — 'Hell' — cuts into idealised images of Swedish girls sunbathing naked in a lagoon filmed by a hidden camera — the 'Heaven' of the title. Forged and softly pornographic these scenes are and they illustrate very well the mondo predilection for images of women representing an idyllic fantasy — youthful female heterosexuality as liberating, intoxicating, democratic. Scattini, like Proia is not averse to employing sexploitation to fire-up his films. A scene depicting a group of sadistic bikers, driven by a minimal, repetitive guitar riff ends with the gang-rape of a young girl. We watch this from a POV up her skirt before moving up to a close-up of her blank face. The audience very easily becomes complicit in her exploitation. A haunting freeze frame on her left eye ends with a remark about what this has born witness to. Voyeurism is not devoted to female sexuality though. A striking, and according to the LP sleeve notes "difficult to pull off" scene involving illicit alcohol and drug taking is shot through blurry trees, monitoring the

passing backwards and forwards of the bottle. Occasionally the men involved spot the camera and unsteadily wave it away. During a sequence regarding the way in which affluent Swedes' derelict country homes are used by male vagrants the camera 'chances' upon them in the dark — its torch beam blast them full in the face. They try to turn away. The tone towards the subjects of the film with regard to examples of youth culture is less moralising than other mondos (at least in the original Italian); pity would be a better description of the quiet narration. Scattini here too has learned well from Jacopetti. The narrator asks a group of young drug takers of the Stockholm strip "why do you do it?" to which the replies are incoherent. "It's terrible..." he mutters disconsolate, and the scene tails off. Mondo films often contain scenes of detached amusement at some 'crazy' aspect of 'modern' living- the cinematic version of the parental head-shake. This occurs in *Svezia...* when the decline of the Latin/Italian lover is attributed to the increasing interest by Swedish girls for black men (from the "third world" we are told) a theme later reworked fictionally by compatriot Tinto Brass in *Nerosubianco* (1969). The lothario now has to resort to becoming 'hip' and frequenting groovy bars where topless girl bands play blaring psycho beat, surely the inspiration for Russ Meyer's 'Carrie Nations' in *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls* (1970). One of the most bizarre and 'avant-garde' parts of the film occurs at the climax of a scene depicting

Previous page **Girls in the garage... one of the sights and sounds in *Svezia, Inferno e Paradiso*.**
This page **Scenes from *Svezia, Inferno e Paradiso*: a lesbian kiss, space hoppers and a biker rape.**

loneliness and depression amongst the abandoned — the flip side of a rapidly developing, modern consumer culture. In desperation a young girl tries to telephone a priest for help; but he is already conversing with someone else, she can't get through. Her frustration is expressed through an odd montage of still images of empty cold streets. These are intercut with her face until finally we 'jump-cut' to a bridge and her suicide leap. This is all achieved through the shock of severe montage, almost amateurishly rendered but horrifying and vivid. Effects are employed again as the film ends with a freeze frame close-up on a blonde Swedish girl's face — heaven or hell? The Italians are, as always, ambiguous. And this presumably has been the fascination for such a feature length study. *Svezia, Inferno e Paradiso* is less 'real' than Sjöman's film but no less puzzling and intriguing for non-Scandinavians as a colourful portrait of a culture in conflict.

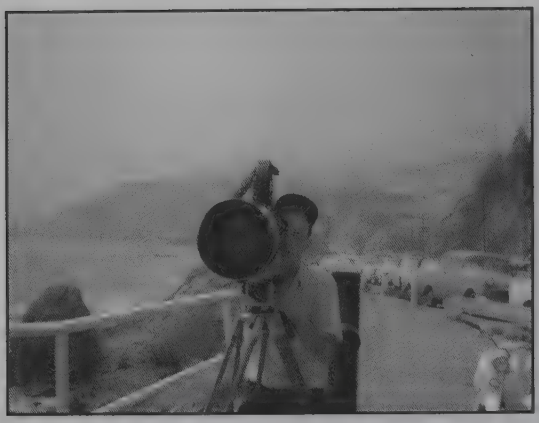
Mondo Freudo

Dir: R. Lee Frost
USA, 1966

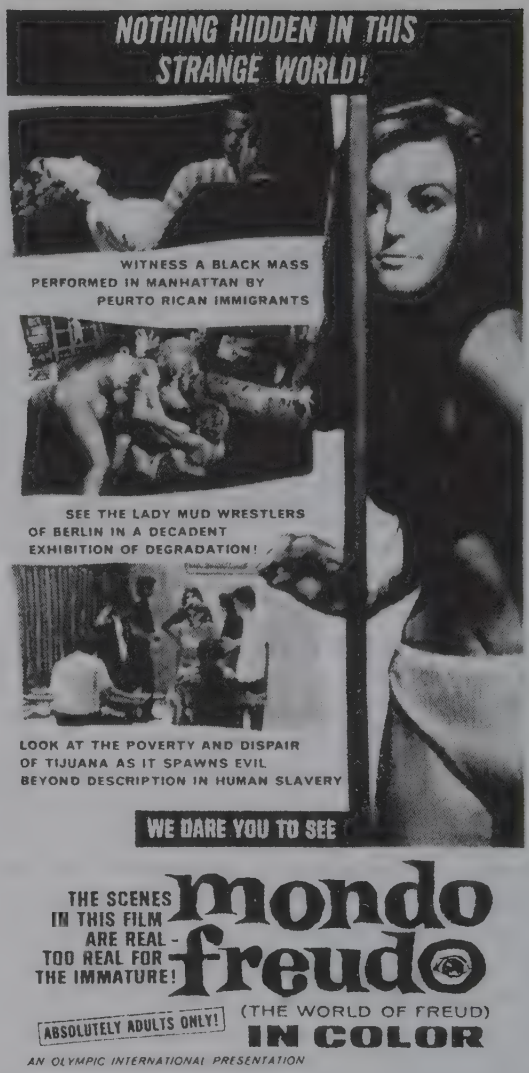
□ It is a fact that Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud first developed the notion of scopophilia. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Freud identified scopophilic behaviour as that which takes other people as objects and subjects them to a controlling and curious gaze. Freud later extended this practice to a sexualised pattern of pleasure seeking, which, in its extreme forms becomes perverted: the activities of the 'peeping tom' for example. True, Freud developed this; yet it is unlikely that he ever envisaged his complex hypothesis being used as a justification for selling cheap voyeuristic exploitation movies to jaded American film audiences. *Mondo Freudo* is the most blatant manifestation of the cinematic peep show — a film fashioned almost entirely out of sexualised 'hidden camera' and 'secret filming' moments. The film was compiled by Robert 'Bob' Cresse an American sexploitation producer, a creator, through his company Olympic International Films of the kind of grindhouse fayre that exploded in America in the post-war period. 'Mondo' was merely the latest vehicle for such activities. The film both depicts sexual acts through representational processes and is at the same time a sexual act in itself — precisely a scopophilic one. *Mondo Freudo* is blatant because from the outset the film is frank about its motives. The scene opens on a beach in Southern California, a sunny Saturday afternoon when people are relaxing, swimming, playing. We see a camera operator fixing an enormous

protruding lens onto the front of a film camera. A voice over begins to outline the technical specifications of the lens ("a telescopic... a 1000 millimetre... with telebar") and then the camera ("an Arriflex eleven 'B' thirty-five millimetre") before assuring the viewer that these mechanisms will "give you a long, close-up look at our society... and... will be your eye onto the Freudian world". Now the camera closes in on the sunbathers and begins to pick out individuals as the credits and music begin to appear, a demonstration of the powerful capabilities of the film camera and its apparatus to objectify human behaviour for sexual pleasure. As if to reinforce this act of voyeurism, and to impress the viewer further with the capabilities of the kit, the scene switches to night time and we now look at the beach through an infra-red filter and lights "developed by the US military" that allow us to see what young couples are up to in the dark "without them being aware of the light". Aside from the avalanche of technical information, aimed clearly at the budding amateur cinephotographer (famed for combining image-making with voyeurism) the narrator offers a few behavioural observations of his own: "Sex under the sun is not for the civilised... only the night can wash away their modesty". The shots of seminaked couples rolling around in the sand are

Previous page **Director Luigi Scattini, on the set of *Svezia, Inferno e Paradiso*.** This page **The *Mondo Freudo* band and dancers.**



rendered through a red haze. The shots are so close-up to naked breasts and thighs and the spotlight so intensely focussed that they become fragmented and abstracted reminiscent, inappropriately, of parts of Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971). The scene is a clear studio set-up, a fake that only adds to the surreal aura of the segment. The film switches then to black and white (for reasons which are never made clear) and we are at a "watusi club" on the Sunset Strip in Hollywood. Then to a burlesque set-up from *Hollywood's World of Flesh*. From here the film follows a familiar pattern: sequences purportedly showing the plethora of sexualised night club acts and routines of this "Freudian World" unfold. Private and public clubs in England are visited, the crucial difference being that in private clubs full nudity is allowed. A succession of strippers demonstrate this as a sombre-faced audience look on. A man diverts his eyes at the final all-naked moment. The audience applaud modestly. The pseudo-documentary pretence is maintained when the crew trace (fake looking) cards displayed on a wall adverting prostitutes to two 'lesbians'. The director interviews the girls and offers to pay them to perform for him. They begin to do this but request that the camera be turned off as they could be arrested... and so the scene ends. A "topless watusi" club is lingered over as girls, one black and one white, shake on caged podiums to riffs from


NOTHING HIDDEN IN THIS STRANGE WORLD!
WITNESS A BLACK MASS PERFORMED IN MANHATTAN BY PEURTO RICAN IMMIGRANTS
SEE THE LADY MUD WRESTLERS OF BERLIN IN A DECADENT EXHIBITION OF DEGRADATION!
LOOK AT THE POVERTY AND DISPAIR OF TIJUANA AS IT SPAWNS EVIL BEYOND DESCRIPTION IN HUMAN SLAVERY
WE DARE YOU TO SEE
THE SCENES IN THIS FILM ARE REAL - TOO REAL FOR THE IMMATURE!
mondo freudo
(THE WORLD OF FREUD)
IN COLOR
ABSOLUTELY ADULTS ONLY!
AN OLYMPIC INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATION

house band 'The Duvals'. Other sequences show a female slave market in Tijuana (where genitals are 'scratched out') and a ludicrous portrayal of a Puerto Rican black mass, patently assembled in a studio, and crammed with as much fetishist extreme close-up naked breast swinging, crotch shots and chicken blood made from red paint as the producers could stretch to. The regular mondo diversion into modern art takes place: we witness two painters, Thor and Lorenzo, who respectively use naked women as canvasses (a la Piero Manzoni) or to paint with (a la Yves Klein).

Frost and Cresse, despite some occasionally competent cinematography, are not good filmmakers. The narration is mock professorial, silly and, like most of the scenes, slow and contrived. A sunset strip "girlesque" sequence (filmed again in black and white to spuriously connote 'realism') of a live sex floor show omits the sex act itself by the crude device of having the back of a member of the audience's head obscure their "hidden camera". If a "Freudian world" consists almost entirely of the breasts of young women bobbling, swaying, bouncing, probing, jiggling, flopping and rising in front or above of a large camera lens then *Mondo Freudo* is a verité film masterpiece. It doesn't and the America predilection for this artless burlesque form of filmmaking, which in the English-speaking world effectively is mondo, adds nothing to the credibility of the genre. The producers of this film prominently display a large poster for the Italian pre-mondo *Sexy Proibito*, made some four years earlier, on the walls of one of their 'nightclubs' which only confirms, despite their boast that *Mondo Freudo* is "the first documentary to examine the hidden world of sex", how tired and repetitious this variant had become.

I Malamondo

Dir: Paolo Cavara
Italy, 1963

□ Cavara, who collaborated with Jacopetti and Prosperi on *Mondo Cane* and directed some of the most famous scenes of that film, can be regarded as a filmmaker intimately engaged with the concept of the 'camera-eye'. That is not to claim that *Malamondo*, Cavara's first solo move after the Jacopetti and Prosperi collaborations, is a masterpiece of film art, even of mondo film art. The camera work is not as vibrant and engaging as in other mondos and is occasionally out-of-focus; the emphasis in the film, a portrait of the sex and danger of early 1960s youth

THE THRILL GENERATION..
THE ECCENTRICS, THE ANGUISHED, THE CONFUSED TAKING A RIDE ON THIS WIDE, WILD WORLD...
MARSHALL NAIFY PRESENTS
MALAMONDO
EastmanCOLOR
Produced by GOFFREDO LOMBARDO · Directed by PAOLO CAVARA
Music by ENNIO MORRICONE
Released by MAGNA PICTURES DISTRIBUTION CORPORATION
THRILL TO THESE HIT TUNES!
'FUNNY WORLD' • 'SAD SATURDAY NIGHT'
Sung by CATHERINE SPAAK
Sung by ADRIANO CELENTANO

culture, acknowledged openly as Cavara's personal vision, is at times conservative and simplistic, moralising in tone. The direction (assisted by Franco Giraldi, later the maker of many 'spaghetti westerns') lacks a unifying structure of purpose. It is often flat and if anything is more like tired reportage. For Italian critics Antonio Bruschini and Antonio Tentori in fact, it is only the great score by Ennio Morricone that distinguishes it from other mondos of the period- a not unreasonable observation. Yet Cavara's understanding of the power of the camera-eye, developed on *Mondo Cane* and realised most effectively later in *L'Occhio Selvaggio* (see below) was processed through the making of this film and lies at the heart of his film philosophy. The first scenes of the film demonstrate this succinctly. As the theme song Funny World ends we emerge on an extreme close-up of a pair of rheumy eyes. A slow zoom out re-

Previous page **A big camera for those telling close-ups of our society in *Mondo Freudo*.**

veals the eyes to be those of the philosopher Bertrand Russell who is lecturing a group of students on how to live life effectively and to avoid "repeating the errors of the past". These young people, we are informed, "do not want to be part of mass society". Suddenly we have left Russell's stuffy academic retreat and are confronted with a shock-cut montage of young faces, all of them fixed with restless contempt. This quick-fire burst of adolescent aggression is heightened by Morricone's discordant score: a mess of blaring trumpets, machine-gun drum rolls (part of his score for *Battle of Algiers* is a reprisal of this) and rising vocal refrains. The sequence ends with a woman scornfully laughing at the camera — and at us. Thus the voices of modern authority are shunned in preference to a wild and free existential living. The then perceived alarming effects of this are the heart of *Malamondo*. The boredom of youth — regularly identified in mondo as the cause of social problems — is exemplified as a group of young, post-war-rich Italians "who don't dig anything" are driven by apathy to slaughter a pig, after which the participants all look numb and sickened; "no one is hungry now" intones the narrator. The futility of youthful excess. Scenes at concentration camp Dachau, which is now a museum, are shown and young Germans are warned of the dangers such apathy can instigate. Again their expressions, as a former prisoner painfully relates the horrors he witnessed, are profoundly numb. Two sequences then depict the violence of youth: the first, a barely credible biker's game held the English town of Leicester, is called "Conquering Hero" where the first motorcyclist to circle the town before a jukebox record ends 'gets the girl'. This climaxes when the leader skids through a red light into a truck and is found with blood trickling out of his mouth. This race is set to a fine variation of one of Morricone's spaghetti themes — the Wild East Midlands anyone? The second features a French game of 'Chicken' in which two participants must stand atop a rising elevator until it hits the skylight and one of them snaps and yells out. Bizarre student rituals are filmed: a Prussian military school, where duel scars were once proudly acquired through swordsmanship must now, due to restrictions, be obtained via a barber's razor. Blood drips obscenely through the shaving foam. There is a Dutch form of hazing where heads of new students are shaved before they are humiliated. Cambridge University students

stage an anti-war protest on Remembrance Day. Sex and horror are important elements in the *Malamondo*: students in Nottingham are said to live out life in the spirit of the town's most famous son, D H Lawrence, by indulging in wild sex parties (held in terraced houses); northern Italian students gather on the beach for a striptease; a group of necrophilliacs meet for an orgy of drink and sex across the gravestones of the dead — "the tenants downstairs don't complain" quips the narrator. A number of oddities flesh out the film: a mixed race marriage in Sweden is observed before the comment is made that in Scandinavia "the Latin Lover has given way to the appeal of African Lover". The "civilization" of the Swedish girls in doing this is praised (this scene was reprised in Luigi Scattini's *Svezia... Inferno e Paradiso*); Cavara, recalling his infamous shoot of Yves Klein for *Mondo Cane*, has a dig at a French performance artist's happening, an "intellectual orgy" where the concept of flinging paint at a rapidly spinning canvas is first displayed, later to be copied by Brit artist Damien Hirst. The naked-girl-on-a-child's-toy-truck image emblazoned across the publicity for the film occurs here; Italian rocker Adriano Celentano and his group compose and perform a new hit in a Roman piazza.

The only youngsters to be admired by the filmmakers are a group of Royal Ballet School students who "unlike most of their generation... don't cultivate violence — they let themselves be cultivated".

The film ends with a warning as to the effect of all of this "frantic, irrational and absurdity" as Sweden, which has "the world highest suicide rate" is revisited. A girl ensconced in a bed-sit contemplates suicide whilst listening to a version of one of the film's theme tunes sung by Belgian Catherine Spaak. But in Sweden there is a helpline to a minister who can "save her soul". The final caption of a giant yellow question mark heralds the usual mondo mixed-message — half-hearted empathy tinged with admonishments. "Are they any farther out than the youth of the past?" asks the narrator". "Whom do they hurt... mostly themselves and the ones they love".

HE USED A CAMERA
like MOST MEN
USE a WOMAN
...and a woman like something you'd keep locked up in a cage! See the strange secret world of the 'Mondo Movie' makers in...
PHILIPPE LEROY
DELIA BOCCARDO
THE WILD EYE
TINTI · GARGIULLO · BLOCH
MARCI · CAVARA · MARCHETTI
COLORSCOPE
AN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL RELEASE

The voyeurism of *Malamondo* is modest by mondo standards and largely based around an attempt at explaining youth culture to an older audience (nudity and violence were played out more in the advertising campaign for the film). Cavara realised after making the film that there were 'issues' with the inherent voyeurism of mondo films. His next film fought against this.

L'Occhio Selvaggio

[The Wild Eye]
Dir: Paolo Cavara
Italy, 1967

He used a camera like most men used a woman — and a woman like something you'd keep in a cage!

□ *L'Occhio Selvaggio* — The Wild Eye — is not, despite its thematic and directorial credentials, a mondo film. And yet it is one of the most important film documents in any

Previous page **Extreme close-up, and a naked girl on a child's toy truck, as featured in the advertising for *Malamondo*.**

history, no matter how selective or minute, of the shockumentary genre. The reason for this is that the film offers an effective, snarling, bitter critique of mondo ethics and was the first to do so — a year before Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* and a decade before Ruggero Deodato's infamous mondo-shock deconstruction *Cannibal Holocaust*. Cavara was there first and the film, crucially, has the authority of a director intimately involved in the creation, at the inception of the 'classic' mondo style. Almost every frame of *L'Occhio Selvaggio* resonates with the practices, techniques, experiences and moral questions, those real, and those imagined by critics, of the genre developed by the *Mondo Cane* team of which Cavara was an integral founding member. Cavara's involvement in the creation of mondo films is today forgotten despite the fact that in 1951 he engaged in a film expedition with Franco Prosperi and Carlo Gregoretti (see *Africa Addio*) and made films for Italian television. His early death at the age of fifty-eight means he is one of few mondo directors not able to present his perspective on the genre.

The experience of producing *Mondo Cane* and his own mondo feature *I Malamondo* a year or so after, had evidently troubled Cavara. Thus in this film he turned the prying eye of the documentary camera away from the subject/object and onto the protagonist — in this case his alter-ego 'Paolo' (Philippe Leroy) an unscrupulous director of shock documentary scenes, in order to comment on the psychological and emotional effects he had experienced as a sensation-seeking journalist. It's a bold move; the horrible

protagonist of the film not only shares Cavara's first name but his physical appearance (despite this Cavara tried to deny that Paolo was modelled on himself). The result of this catharsis of his role in the production of mondo documentaries was that afterwards Cavara abandoned documentary films in favour of more 'honest' fiction comic and thriller films. If not an outright rejection of documentary Cavara at least wanted audiences to accept documentary as a mere translation of reality — a personal, as opposed to didactic, statement on the world. Paolo too trades in the production of cinematically induced emotions and his theories on the production of films are expunged throughout the narrative, theories dedicated to "truth sacrificed to the requirements of the show".

The film stars Italian Gabriele Tinti and Frenchman Philippe Leroy, both stalwarts of European popular cinema (Tinti appeared in cult-pop offerings such as Marco Vicario's *Il Grande Colpo dei Sette Uomini D'oro* [1966] and several of the 'Emanuelle Nera' series including *Emanuelle e gli Ultimi Canninbali* [1977]; Leroy, by appearing in films such as *Femina Ridens* [1969], *Roma Bene* [1971], *Il Suo Nome è Sandokan* [1976] and *Il Gatto* [1978] bestrides the complete history of Italian cult cinema). Delia Boccardo plays Barbara, Paolo's muse and desire object. The film follows the attempts of this group to produce a sensational documentary film of horrible events based largely in the Far East with the Vietnam War as a backdrop. Paolo is a ruthless individual who will stop at nothing to get good, sellable pictures.

His meditations on the art of the shockumentary are hideously cynical. He says to Barbara at one point, after she has confronted him with the morality of his techniques: "audiences are masochistic and sadistic. A pretty girl with a rifle arouses their masochism; the same girl helpless and unarmed, their sadism. There are no good or bad films. There are just those with or without the occasional stimulation that makes the public digest the rest of the film". To illustrate this Cavara inserts, in true mondo style, some light moments detailing Paolo and Barbara's

Previous page and this page **"Reality is boring — lies are entertaining" is the credo of *L'Occhio Selvaggio*.**

romance and love-making, travelogue scenes poeticised by Gianni Marchetti's great lounge-jazz score. Paolo constantly attempts to construct scenarios that will heighten the reality kick. He tries to persuade a Siamese Buddhist monk to set himself on fire in front of a sacred statue while Barbara and he make love. Later, in a Saigon bar, he asks two Viet Cong informers to find him monks that are prepared to be sacrificed in the same way. Both of these requests fail but he does succeed in bribing the owner of a rehabilitation home for opium addicts (after being disappointed with the 'reality' of the centre: "there's not much movie-wise") to let him film them being beaten as part of their treatment. He also films Barbara's disgust as she watches this scene unfold (Deodato lifted this concept for *Cannibal Holocaust*). A faded deposed sultan allows Paolo to film his destitution in a series of humiliating set-ups which Paolo takes great care to make look aesthetically pleasing (butterflies — hired in — drop through the shafts of temple light while the sultan is forced to catch and then eat them). As if to authenticate the message of *L'Occhio Selvaggio* Cavara draws on real-life incidents from the (and his) mondo world. These include the capture, arrest and beating of Paolo, his cameraman Valentino (Tinti) and producer by the Viet Cong as they try to film rebel positions. "We're Italian journalists!" Paolo protests in a clear reference to the incidence of Jacopetti's arrest in *Africa Addio*. Back at the hotel after he has been released he asks Valentino "did you get any film of me being beaten?" another tangible dig at his ex-colleague (Cavara, who was one of the Italian-based editors of the rushes for *Africa Addio* is alleged to have instigated accusations of staging after seeing the footage). The spirit of Jacopetti rears up again when Paolo and Valentino get to film a rebel execution but persuade the officers to move the prisoner so that the light is better (these were accusations — thrown out in court — levelled at Jacopetti and Prosperi over *Africa Addio*). Even the opening of the film, the crew hunting a gazelle across an open plain, refers to the zebra hunt in the same film. The first truly voyeuristic sequence in the film starts with a wide-angled shot of Valentino looking through the viewfinder back at us, a dual-scopophilic moment. It is revealed they are filming deaf and dumb prostitutes. As Cavara had also worked on *La Donna nel Mondo* the exploitation of women by mondo directors is clearly an issue. The strap line for the film in the US illustrated this beautifully and the threat that the wild eye "sees things you wouldn't dare look at!" is the garish language of the peep show. "We are all objects" Paolo says to Barbara and he is constantly seen closely watching her: at dinner, on the boat, in the cinema.

L'Occhio Selvaggio, shot in Techniscope with high production values is a powerful and disturbing insight into the mind of a mondo director. The existential angst of a filmmaker beginning to question his motives and methods was improved by the additional script work of Italian novelist and travel writer Alberto Moravia (see also *Ultime Grida dalla Savana* and *Magic Nuda*). At the end of the film, after Paolo has filmed the bombing of an American nightclub in Saigon, his delight in getting the pictures is halted when he discovers Barbara has been killed by the collapsing ceiling. As he kneels next to her corpse he urges Valentino to "get me on film". He stares down the lens of the only thing he has left — his camera. The frame freezes.

"Reality is boring — lies are entertaining" Paolo once stated, as if to articulate exactly the mantra of mondo cinema. Have we learned from this?

Sensational Shock Scenes

anti-narrative in mondo

In constructing Mondo Cane, Jacopetti utilized the avant-garde arsenal of cut-up/ collage, alienation and shock in the brazenly unconvincing guise of the documentary film. Mondo Cane jumps from image to image in a purely subconscious and anti-linear way
Stuart Swezey/Amok

The avant-garde offers no solutions or programmatic statements, but a series of intricate challenges, hints, and coded messages, subverting both style and content
Amos Vogel

It may be a sign of richness in a work of art both that it attracts a conflict of critical judgements and also that it appeals strongly from several different aspects
Ralph Stephenson & J R Debrix

Extreme Images

My version (of the fake newsreel)... would be a compilation so artfully faked as to convince the audience that it was real, while at the same time reminding them that it might be wholly contrived
J G Ballard

Realta' Romanzesca

MONDO FILMS visualize humanities fears, phobias and subconscious desires as cut-up collages of raw mediated experience. According to critic Herman G Weinberg "film should be fluid, restless, visceral, dynamic" and in the stream of consciousness world of the mondo film such an assault on the audience's senses recalls many of the powerful features of the avant-garde. Mondo films, like the work of the British author J G Ballard, alchemize the horrors of (post) modern culture and society from documentary evidence into cogent warnings of the present and the future. Ballard's book, *The Atrocity Exhibition,* namechecks the work of Jacopetti ("zooms for some new Jacopetti, the elegant declensions of serialized violence"), and the book's revolutionary experimental collage format can clearly (if strangely, given that mondo films are 'documentaries') be associated with mondo film aesthetics. *The Atrocity Exhibition* follows a fervently anti-linear, anti-narrative form. The text is punctuated by a series of shock headings that give way to startling and mesmerising provocations, which are at once poetry, reportage, fiction and social comment. In a special edition of the book Andrea Juno and V. Vale describe the work as a "flickering video collage in written form". Evidently this collage — "slow-motion newsreels" — for Ballard was best represented by the mondo film. Ballard's 'exhibition of atrocities' is a showcase with a "preoccupation with the theme of world cataclysm". If mondo films are accused of pessimism it is perhaps this aspect of the post-modern world — the destruction of all that is 'natural' — that is being articulated. It is the "psychotic imagination" of avant-garde art that is captured by mondo films in terms of both form, and of content, where weird images flash past the viewer and the shock-art tropes of juxtaposition, expressionism fragmentation, distortion, blurring, freezing, free association startles and numbs. The films that are examined in more detail in this chapter have taken the grave form of the documentary film and blasted it into fragments of perversity, voyeurism, horror, shock and absurdity. In this sense, mondo films beautifully mimic art and the avant-garde.

Yet this engagement takes a bizarrely contradictory form. On the one hand sequences in mondo films mock and chastise the excesses of the post-war avant-garde. The places where burlesque visions and performance art merge are highlighted grotesquely, and the reactionary and conservative ideology of the mondo director and 'his' aesthetic is clear in repeated sequences where modern art in its profligate, difficult, concrete form is lampooned and mocked. Mondo directors thus view art experimentation as daft. Moreover, mondo films are polished and crafted: well shot and edited with consummate skill (prolific mondo editor Mario Morra, for example, went on to edit Tornatore's Oscar winning *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*), and unlike art films, were often paid for by 'mainstream' film producers (Rizzoli, Titanus), benefiting from healthy commercial input. Mondo films were also popular, a crude commercial fact that negates them from most categories of avant-garde art. As mondo films, unlike many avant-garde films, are not concerned with the subjective psyche of the director they remain absent from histories of the cinematic avant-garde. Parker Tyler's account of 'underground film', for example, equates Wiseman's *Titicut Follies* (a candid-camera documentary), and Sjöman's *I Am Curious (Yellow)*, a fake documentary), as avant-garde but no mondo films make the list. Tyler, however, identifies at the start of his book that to "taboo reality" is a crime. "The film camera has for one of its most neglected functions that of invading and recording realism which have to some degree remained taboo — too private, too shocking, too immoral for photographic reproduction". The "camera voyeur" is hailed as one of the principle functions of the cinematic art, "peephole excitement" being a significant presence. The mondo film, heretically coalescing pop culture and

art, the extreme and the popular, acts this way. Again, while discussing *Titicut Follies*, Tyler observes that one of the qualities of the film for the observer is a "voyeur's vantage point" from which one can "leave...on impulse without fuss". This frank appraisal of the documentary art form (in this example, recall a classic of 'direct cinema' as well as a work of the 'underground') suits the mondo film's aesthetic dimensions; the 'burlesque visions' of mondo are acute, painful and hypnotic. Tyler calls *Titicut Follies* a "psycho-nudie peepshow" — a better description of films such as *Mondo di Notte* and *Europa di Notte* would be hard to find. So on the other hand, mondo films, in their structure, form and narrative belie a richly experimental aesthetic. Aside from the noticeable collage effect of joining seemingly disparate events together in the edit process (*Il Pelo nel Mondo*), from the use of beautiful music to underscore scenes of ghastly despair (*Mondo di Notte 3*), to a free-form surreal conceptualisation (*Realta' Romanzesca*), the mondo film itself is a work of modern art. Moreover, the mondo film's 'practices of looking' at the world and it's events, the relentless desire to see the forbidden is a technique favoured by avant-garde filmmaker's as diverse as Brakhage, Franju and Jodorowsky.

It is intended that such propositions frame mondo films as works of underground cinema, film art, subversive art, taboo art, auteuristic expression. Hans Richter once stated that the phenomenon of the avant-garde had to be "international" and mondo films, perhaps more than any other film, exhibit this globalising tendency (albeit in a wildly perverted form). Unflinchingly filmed and presented, the mondo film assaults the viewer as an art film does — the same flash of horror, revulsion, and optical assault created

This page **Europa di Notte, a "psycho-nudie peepshow."**

by Buñuel at the opening of his surrealist classic, *Un Chien Andalou,* reverberates through many of the jolts spiralling out of mondo. The beauty of the images as filmed and edited, the "horrible truths" parading deliriously before the film audience, the cuts, slashes and piercings of the mondo film evoke the type of ritualistic sacrifice beloved of the surrealists' imagination (Georges Bataille). Mondo editing scrupulously follows the theories of Sergei Eisenstein whose 'collision' technique, where sequences directly juxtaposed, evoked new images and ideas (there is another resonance with Eisenstein: his *Que Viva Mexico* — a poetic documentary film about Mexican ritual with vaguely pornographic undertones). In mondo, montage is used expressively (as opposed to narratively) with the specific purpose of producing an immediate 'panic' effect resulting in "that rare species: the artful documentary...surrealistic mostly through juxtaposition" (Parker Tyler).

The art world penchant for the work of the insane or the innocent (children) is a celebration of the purity of the individual untainted by contemporary lived experience. This too can be located within aspects of the mondo view of the world as Technicolor primitive-ritualistic spectacle (when filtered through the writing of occasional mondo scribe Alberto Moravia this seems again to be a reasonable association). I once took the liberty of aligning Jacopetti and Prosperi's mesmerising *Addio Zio Tom* with Jodorowsky's *El Topo* as both long-neglected films spiralled in to surreal/stream of consciousness/free-form 1970s reality/unreality head aesthetics. *El Topo* has always been regarded as an art film and both this and *Addio Zio Tom* makes extensive like-minded use of dream-like sequences. Parker Tyler argues at the end of his book, *Underground Film,* that the "avant garde...has infiltrated commercial films". In mondo films, the ultimate absorbers of film style for effect, this notion came true.

In a famous essay, *The Cinema of Poetry*, Pier Paolo Pasolini argues for film as a collapsing of reality (referent signs) and unreality (dreams). This was a troubling proposition for critics of cinema in the mid 1960s/early 1970s fixated as they were with 'true' realism but one within which the mondo film — a confusion of documentary reality and poetics that evokes the art film — seems to happily exist. For Pasolini, the filmmaker makes art out of enriching his

or her memories and dreams with personal expression — a "language of poetry". Subjectivity is poetic for Pasolini and it is subjectivity that distinguishes the art film. Cinema — poetry comes from an intense and rich manipulation of cinematic codes (the contrary of placing a still camera observing an event — in other words *narrative*). Interestingly, mondo films bypass Pasolini's "free indirect subjective" — where the filmmaker speaks through characters — by way of the bitter narration that carries the mondo anti-narrative (in *Mondo Cane,* Jacopetti speaks directly to the audience). Stan Brakhage identified the "visionary rhetoric", the filmmaker as poet", where the director bears a camera as economically, as flexible and as intimate as the pen". Meanwhile, Astruc's notion of the 'camera-stylo' — the camera wielded like a pen by the author/director, refers back to the mondo film's essay format. The essayist here acts as a total filmmaker, an auteur, and another crucial aspect of film as art.

Art film techniques

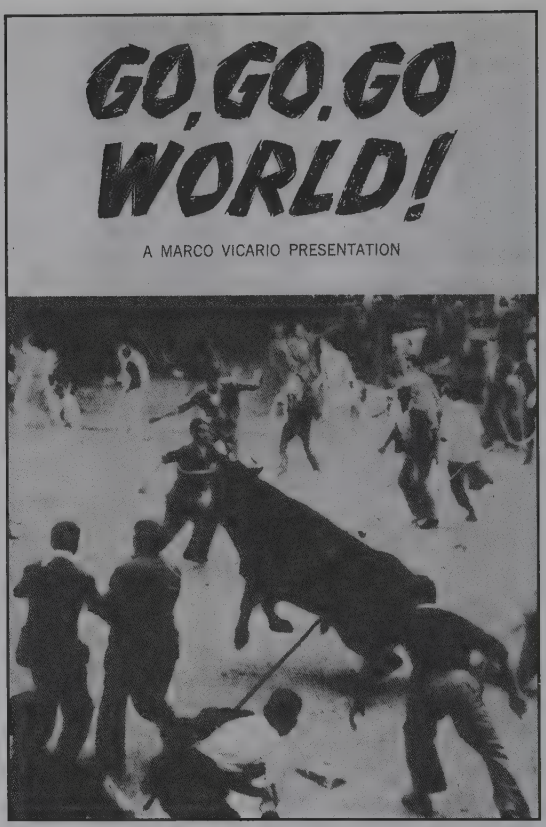
> ***I dream of a theatre in which humour and poetry, panic and love would all be one***
> *Fernando Arrabal*

Extensive use of stop-motion, or the freeze-frame, emerged alongside the golden age of mondo as a viable film technique (previous to this the abstract quality was derided as too fake to be used — certainly in a documentary film). Art film employs still images (in the case of Chris Marker's *La Jetee* exclusively) but freezing the frame (repeating a frame) in mondo has a very different effect from this. Freeze-frame is used in mondo either to evoke reflection or make people look ridiculous. Often a freeze-frame ends a sequence (as in Truffaut's *400 Blows*). But uniquely mondo films, especially those of Jacopetti and Prosperi, direct the freeze-frame to *begin* sequences — a startlingly artificial device. Mondo films also make use of the trance flash-back. In *Africa Addio* the trail of Mau Mau operatives is illustrated with misty and haunting images of the sites of the atrocities. The narration then becomes drenched in echo, the pictures are ghostly and hazy. Again, the artificiality and the poetry of Jacopetti's images contravenes the rules and laws of documentary film exposition. The assault on montage outlined by Amos Vogel and attributed to subversive art cinema is expressed in the mondo predilection for the intense manipulation of the film form. The classic editing structure, introducing a scenario through a long-shot and working into the object of attention is radically overturned in mondo. Scenes *begin* with extreme close-up or freeze-frame in a carefree dispensation with the aesthetics of objectivity. Scenes in mondo films are often not 'established' — the viewer needs to decode the 'meaning' of the context. Traditional devices for creating pleasing transitions between scenes are similarly eschewed — mondo films famously cut violently from one scene to the next — sometimes with logic other times not. In mondo what was once 'intrusive montage' becomes the reality of the shockumentary aesthetic. The poetry and lyrical (film about the director 'looking' — the contrary to documentary where the audience's look is the drive) qualities of mondo film represent beautifully the chaos and fracture of the contemporary world experience. The goal of Arrabal's 'panic' aesthetic is echoed in mondo: "Arrabal refuses to judge; he merely notes the position and shows that he finds it beyond his comprehension" (Esslin). Mondo deploys experimentally the language of cinema to map such psycho-geographies. Vogel's description of the effect of experiments with montage echoes Jacopetti's

Previous page **Scenes in mondo films are often not 'established' — the viewer needs to decode the 'meaning' of the context; *Africa Addio*.**

thesis: "the assault on the old montage...an attempt... to increase the viewer's identification by forcing him into stronger mental and psychological response, thus jolting him from the comfortable safety of his own universe", as does Aristotle's theory of the *catharsis* — the purification of the emotions by art. The work of Proia, Vanzi and Blasetti, combinations of *grand guignol* and *commedia dell'arte,* celebrations of both the horror and the glory of life, are dedicated to the work of experimental film art.

"Life is an enormous novel", Ballard once remarked and it is arguably the mondo film that retells that story most lyrically, intensely and artistically.



Il Pelo nel Mondo

[Go! Go! Go! World]
Dir: Renato Marvi (Marco Vicario) & Anthony M. Dawson (Antonio Margheriti)
Italy, 1964

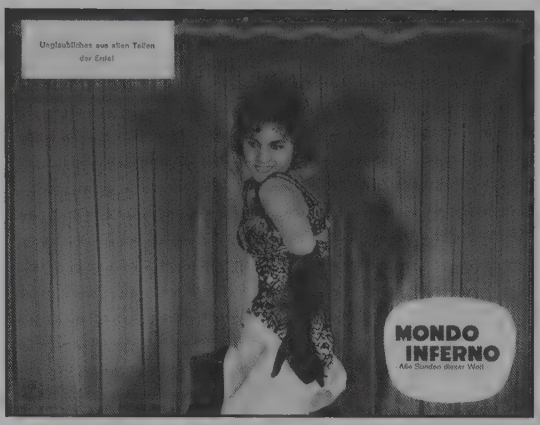
□ Despite being described by Gualtiero Jacopetti as "a film I would not have been proud to have made", *Il Pelo nel Mondo* could rightly be held up as a fine example of a classic blueprint mondo, a documentary film gouged fresh and still warm from the *Mondo Cane* mould. The film was one of very many which followed quickly in the wake of the original and finest mondo works, and yet there are some spirited and dynamic aspects of the film that make it still one of the most watchable shockumentary feasts. The direction is sure and competent (Vicario has become known as a capable director of thriller and horror genre films). Vicario's vision for this film was aided by assistant director, and later western/sci-fi/horror director Antonio Margheriti, and both men maintained the admirably pointless Italian habit of adopting English-language pseudonyms (Vicario chose the even more bewildering step of adopting an *Italian* pseudonym). Margheriti compiled library material for the film and shot some of the scenes with definite panache and occasionally one could be excused for detecting his eerily flamboyant style. But the film mostly bears all of the camp and vibrant marks of a Vicario production. The film's breathtaking pace meanwhile was largely down to some virtuoso editing by Mario Morra who would later play his own important role in the mondo story.

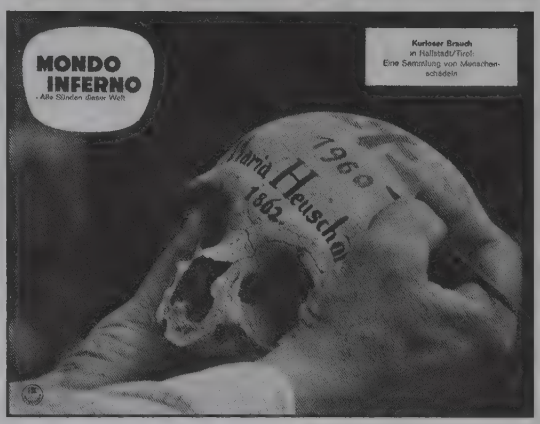
The film begins with a frenetic title sequence rendered in the style of the Italian *fumetto* (cartoon) later perfected by Osvaldo Cavandoli and most famously Bruno Bozzetto. The male cartoon character's zany frolics with an animated globe herald Bozzetto's popular creation, *Il Signor Rossi* (*Mr. Rossi* to kids brought up on doses of his adventures on British TV in the late 1970s). The film has a genuine cartoonish quality — fast, funny and stupid — which has been exaggerated in the English version of the film with its suitably lame, meaningless re-

titling (the Italian translation, The Skin of the World, as well as nicely maintaining the 'flesh' motif, foretells of mondo proclivities to come). As there are over fifty sequences in the film, the construction had to be tight and a mesmerising score by *Mondo Cane/Mondo Cane No.2* collaborator Nino Oliviero, aided by Bruno Nicolai, drives the film brilliantly (the accompanying soundtrack LP represents only about a third of the total score). The great mondo music tradition of trying to shadow the geographical visual locations with geographical audio cues is musically satisfying if sometimes ridiculous. There was so much material in the film and so much music that *Il Pelo nel Mondo* is one of the few mondo films to appear to have a surfeit of material (as opposed to the barrel-scraping exercises of the poorer examples of the genre). The suspect documentary claims of the earlier mondo films appears to have been dispensed with altogether in this film and a full panoply of techniques and effects is deployed by the directors to maintain the energy of the film's title sequence: a portrait on the Italian love of the car is demonstrated by way of the old film joke of thousands of people emerging from one small car; the depiction of English abattoir techniques is run backwards so that the slaughtered pigs are zipped-up. Blurred focus, violent zooms and hidden camera angles abound, a variation on the predictable mondo theme of striptease is offered when an Austrian act is speeded-up in order to demonstrate that the modern man, "healthy, wealthy and dynamic", requires greater acceleration in his favoured nocturnal activity (naturally the comic speed slows right down at the end so that we can admire the girl's backside). There are sequences on the familiar terrains of Hawaii (the stupidity of American tourists), nightlife (lascivious portraits of sex clubs contrasted with moral guff on prostitution), animal use — and abuse, religious and cult ritual, cod philosophising and so on.

So what makes this film special?

The trick *Il Pelo nel Mondo* manages to





In Hamburg wird scharf geschossen!
Wenn das Ziel auch nur am Schießstand auf St. Pauli ist!
MONDO INFERNO
Alle Sünden dieser Welt

This page **Scenes from *Il Pelo nel Mondo*.**

pull off, is in capturing the most entertaining aspects of the 'classic' mondo films and unshakably offering that material in an exciting, giddy manner. The film is finished with such a degree of energy and humour that it is impossible not to be engaged by the activities on screen — a 'skill' many of the later mondo films completely failed to register (even mondo historian David Flint was moved to admit the film a partial success — albeit despite its "dreadful narration"). There are two scenes in the film that for me stand out as exemplary mondo moments and these are worth recounting here as evidence of the film's verve. The first concerns the striptease, which even as early as 1964 had already become a tired act in the mondo theatre. Vicario records a strip based around *La Belle Epoque,* the 'beautiful age', between wars when European culture appeared to offer itself to the world a place of wonder. An unpromising beginning, as the girl disrobes the scene takes a weird turn. We see a couple in the audience sat at a table laughing and smoking. The music switches tone from a light baroque bossa ("a la Mozart") to a sultry sax driven pulse as the stripper's face, eyes closed in mock ecstasy comes close to us, the viewer. As the naked flesh becomes revealed, an odd, fish-eye close up of the man's face menacingly looms towards us too. After a few seconds the act concludes and the girl scuttles off to sparse applause; we are returned to normality. The odd thing about this scene is the switch from the objective record of an event (striptease) to a surreal representation of the inner emotion energising the act. I think Vicario (or did Margheriti lens this sequence?) was trying to spice up the scene but instead created a bizarre and hypnotic effect — a long-lasting one.

The second great moment in the film occurs at the end. We have just watched a searing condemnation of the Italian psyche and its car obsessions. Now we are informed that Italians look to the sky, to the future of air travel, to set themselves free. Glorious helicopter shots across Alpine vistas are supported by the ironic narration: "Earth looks clean at last — as they had always dreamed".

These scenes could only be filmed in this way at the outset of global jet-set living, the optimism and freedom offered by the skies untainted by what was to become. The film ends on a high — a real marvellous high.

I implied at the outset that *Il Pelo nel Mondo* could be held up as a classic textbook case-study of a mondo film. Although far from great, the film captures the energy of the best mondo aesthetics and Vicario, as his subsequent glossy thrillers proved, was more than just a shockumentary hack.

Europa di Notte

Dir: Alessandro Blasetti
Italy, 1959

□ Watching this quaint, almost silly little film in the twenty-first century, it's hard to appreciate the significance of *Europa di Notte* to the mondo genre. The film was directed by Alessandro Blasetti, Italy's great inventor of the episode film, was assistant directed by Luigi Vanzi (who refined the first experiments with a mondo aesthetic) and was scripted by Gualtiero Jacopetti (who gave the mondo film it's 'voice' and finally created the quintessential examples of the genre). It is a film poised at the germinal of shockumentary film history. Blasetti's simple aim, to record and transform the heyday of risqué nightclub entertainment as theatre into entertainment as film, resulted in a mildly surprising melange of colourful sounds and images (as opposed to the brutal shock of later mondos). Blasetti concocted the key elements of early period mondo: the weird, the funny, and the sexy (films such as *Europa di Notte*, *Sexy al Neon*, *Mondo di Notte* are identified as 'mondo sexy' in Italian film lore). Although Jacopetti later repudiated the impact of the nightclub acts on his own film style as 'too fake', its not difficult to note the elements of sexual titillation, voyeurism and the freakish in later more savage mondo films, elements in fact which have never left the genre. Above all, *Europa di Notte*, explores and revels in the burlesque, the circus aesthetic beloved of Italian film (especially Federico Fellini). Blasetti inter-cuts performance scenes with 'actuality' shots of different European locations. Strangely, this works in opposition to later mondos and to Jacopetti's observations that these 'realties' were in fact infinitely richer, more intriguing and perverse than any of the contrived acts on show and on stage. In a similar way, shots of the audience are inserted, sometimes with corny 'real' dialogue, as a framing device for the acts. Throwaway perhaps, but looking at them now they rationalise and contextualise the intended impact of the burlesque acts on show (the leering middle-aged men, pulling out cameras and opera glasses for a better view of the female flesh are distained by their wives). We get behind-the-scenes glimpses of the strip-

Previous page ***Il Pelo nel Mondo.***

pers, fake and contrived, but an attempt, at the outset of the mondo genre, to get via the film 'into reality'. The narrator (I'm discussing the English language version) promises us at the beginning of the film, as the camera pans past a 3D model of Europe, the "greatest stars of European show biz — caught in the act!", and surprising though these acts may have been, it's hard not to feel a weird mix of pity tinged with lament. There then proceeds an array of essentially kitsch, 1950s Eurotrash, augmented by Carlo Savina's fantastic swinging lounge beat. Belly dancers (Badia: "princess of the Orient"), Clowns ("The Rastellis"), trapeze artists, singers and strippers. The film features several magicians: Mac Ronay performs non-magic in a buffoonish Tommy Cooper-esque manner while the more intriguing Channing Pollock perfects a super-slick brand of trickery that is so creepy that it is not surprising that French horror master Georges Franju cast him in *Judex*. Brilliant Italian singer-songwriter, Domenico Modugno, receives what has since become the standard mondo mockery (his hymn to Neapolitan coffee is, according to narrator Henry Morgan, "exactly how it is espressoed in Naples"). All of the scenes are pastiches of real locations (i.e. Bernard Delfont's *Club Pigalle*), yet each set-up is so flat and over-lit that it's obviously fake. The audiences, realised in similarly subdued shots cut in-between the acts, reveal a bored and unexcited crowd. Only in the penultimate scene do the customers express any emotion when the British rocker Colin Hicks (brother of Tommy Steele and a frightening facsimile of his brother) 'lets rip'. The tame recreation of the real violence meted out at cinemas and clubs in the US and the UK at this time looks faintly ridiculous, a feeble parody of the sexual energy of rock that's as limp as Hick's contrived wildness.

That said, Blasetti occasionally teases the viewer with some proto-mondo cinematics. The visual record of the undistinguished circus act "The Condoras" unfolds in slow-motion, deployed to give the stunt some tension. In the same way the camera suddenly swings to a POV shot of the trapeze artist, a giddy act of direction which at last brings the film to life. The underscore of weird

avant-jazz lends the scene further intrigue. The climax of the film is an extended strip routine where three performers (a blonde, an 'oriental' and a "dark beauty") strip off with very little enthusiasm (the oriental woman wears a permanently pissed-off visage throughout). However, the stripper

would be a frequent icon of the mid-period mondos to come.

Despite the tameness of *Europa di Notte* today, it is satisfying to witness many of the key elements of the mondo aesthetic put into place: sex, voyeurism, exoticism, sarcastic humour, crazy music. Vanzi and Jacopetti saw the future, and so next the camera turned its corrupt gaze away from the stage on to the audience, and on to the world.

Mondo di Notte 3

[Ecco]
Dir: Gianni Proia
Italy, 1963

□ The languid voice of English actor George Sanders, grave and mordant ,accompanied by the sound of an eerie wind, speaks over a black screen, opening this 'classic' period mondo film in absurdist style:

"The globe has spun around many times before the probing eye of the motion picture camera; so may times in fact, that you may wonder if there is anything left to discover. But to the persistently curious, the world continually reveals new secrets and sights. As Shakespeare put it: 'there are more things in heaven and earth and between sunset and dawn than are dreamt of in your philosophy'. Therefore: ecco', which means look, witness, observe and behold! We show you our world beyond your most outrageous fantasies"

Proia had cut his teeth on previous *Mondo di Notte* efforts and was therefore well placed to portray the world through the shockumentary filter. The film contains numerous burlesque scenarios that pay homage to the director's formative cinematic experiences (the supposed last performance of the *Grand Guignol* in Paris; a pulsating bongo-driven psychedelic striptease; the fraternity of "Touch Buttocks" where the female backside is venerated; lesbian clubs; the "housewives burlesque" of Reno, Nevada where male strippers provide titillation for a change). The gay opening titles, portraits of Romans going about their daily business, decorated by a song in the style of the Italian *canzoncini* (Children's Songs) belies the taste of shocking images to come (although the use of freeze frames to end each character's portrait provokes some viewer unease). The right and proper elements of the

Previous page & this page ***Europa di Notte.***

shockumentary tradition then parade before us: a grim portrait of Berlin divided by the wall — "a city still expiating guilt as frightful as its ruins" — gives way to the activities of an occultist duelling society by way of "a song guiding us to the secrets of the German soul". Over tracking portraits of the young Berliners singing and drinking Sander's describes, "a people that gave the world Goethe, Beethoven, Einstein and Mozart...a nation that made lampshades of human skin!" The masked duellists must slash each other's faces. This is bitter, twisted stuff — ideally exemplifying the mondo tendency for smug moralizing — a brilliant start to the film. Proia demonstrates clearly throughout this film the ideology of the binary opposite. And so, like in *Mondo Cane*, the competing trends of modern society, whether it is the rich French debutantes at a "fairy tale" dance juxtaposed with their beggar counterparts whose "crude violence, cruel provocative humanity" is glimpsed, or racial reconfiguration in Nairobi where black women dance in the 'primitive' style for tourists and in the 'jazz style' for themselves. Another mondo trait of the empathetic cut is also displayed. An insane circus act, where trapeze artists ride a motorcycle up a high-wire to a church tower merges with the mountainous retreat of celibate hermit monks — "divine fishermen" where, accompanying shots of skulls, we are informed that "no priest comes down".

Shock and disgust appears in the tale of the Portuguese whalers, still hunting with harpoons whose ghostly nocturnal activities, "bloody, uncertain and fierce; a savage *corrida* of the sea whose arena is the infinite and whose only spectator is God" proceed to the haunting sound of the *fado* song. Probably the most famous scene in the film

is the depiction of French illusionist, Evon Evar, the "apostle of the will", whose 'act' involves the careful insertion of rapier blades into and through parts of his body, neck and face. It is paramount that Evar avoids the jugular vein when spearing his neck with a blade. The blades are removed by audience members. A small trickle of blood emerges. The repellent visual qualities of this scene were used to sell the picture most notably in the US where the film was repackaged by the notorious Bob Cresse/R L Frost partnership; the antics of Evar certainly highlight the burlesque/performance aspect of mondo films of this period.

The aesthetics of horror also play in the movie. A staged but atmospheric sequence on witchcraft at Dunsmore Castle in the English countryside introduced with a quote from a famous French satirist: "Voltaire wrote: there are no more witches since we stopped burning them. He was wrong". The aesthetics of the horror film are played out as the creepy ghoulish music — wailing voices and layers of organ, percussion (gongs, woodblock) — propels the act of ritual bloody sacrifice, a woman being covered in chicken blood before being defiled. Curiously the device of filming the participants through a grilled window as "they were afraid to allow our cameras inside their church" is replaced by full-screen clarity for the latter scenario. The transfer from a sexualised naked bloody young woman to the towering Christ of Rio's Corcovado, offers another of the films shock edits.

The Italian mondo obsession with Scandinavian culture and society, especially that of "cold, sombre, prosperous" Sweden, is visualised by an account of Swedish 'Teddy Boys' whose violent terror campaigns incorporating reckless driving and the destruction of a funfair end with a couple making love on the roof of a car encircled, Wild West style, by other gang members. A group of guardians look on in shocked disgust. The girl's face is utterly blank, a "frightening kind of despair".

Riz Ortolani turns in another brilliant

soundtrack capturing the psychological loneliness of hermits to the pummelling beat of the Rio Carnival. The above sequence on Evan Ever is made all the more disturbing by the inclusion of Ortolani's experimental, electronic soundscape; a clear demonstration that the composer's virtuosity can incorporate the work of electro sound giants such as Giampiero Boneschi, Pierre Henry, Alain Gourager and Michel Colombier.

No classic example of the mondo genre would be complete without the punctuation of moral certitude, and in *Mondo di Notte,* two sequences offer a gloomy vision of man's future. The first deals with the development of artificial insemination at the world famous British Clinic in Exeter. The clinical aspects

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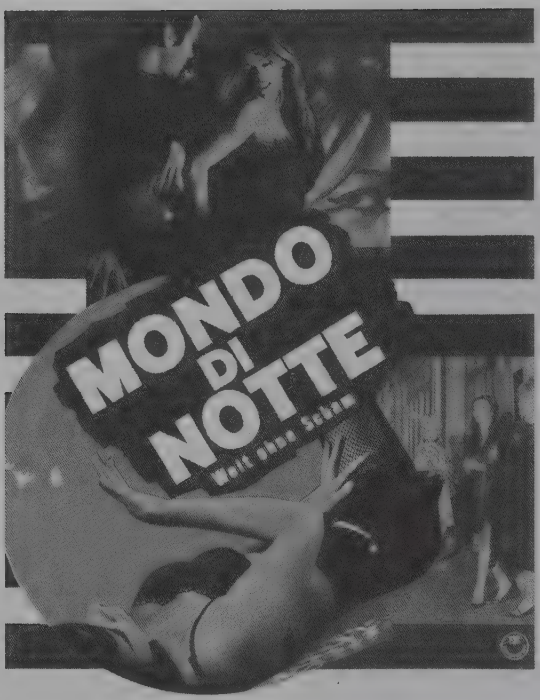


of this operation are emphasized and the elements of this practice that must be laboratorised played up. The female donor for the process even has her eyes crudely scratched out as if she should be ashamed of the ritual, coded as an unnatural act of the desperate. The final *dénouement* represents another case of 'deluded motherhood'. According to ancient beliefs, a woman must climb the many steps of a Roman church in order to be blessed with children by a jewel-encrusted statue of Jesus. As the woman in this film makes her painful ascent she is watched by a cameraman who intrusively snatches images of her pain. No clearer metaphor need be offered about the motives driving mondo filmmakers in their quest for the sensational, the desperate and the sad. Shakespeare is quoted again: "for there are more things in heaven and earth and between sunset and dawn than are dreamt of in your philosophy"

The film ends to the climax of the sweeping choral score on a still frame of the woman's face; another fixed and manufactured moment of human pain.

Realta' Romanzesca

[Realities around the World]
Dir: Gianni Proia
Italy, 1967

□ *Realta' Romanzesca* is easily one of the oddest contributions to the mondo film canon. At first viewing, the film looks simple enough: a compilation of eleven staged re-enactments of 'light' news stories from around the world. The teletype machine, symbol of the global transfer of news communication, which brackets the film signifies the newsworthiness of the stories and has been included to lend the film a patina of journalistic credibility. A still of a real newspaper headline ends each scene, but these look fake. The sequences unfold in a comic-strip style. Hence the title: 'true stories' (as usual the English translation — *Realties around the World* loses the nuanced irony of the original Italian). The common mondo elements are all staunchly in place. Stereotypes appear in the form of the French, who are always leering at young girls and/or crashing their cars; and indistinct Japanese and miserable Germanic characters. Musical signifiers are employed to exaggerate these stereotypes while shock elements are injected to revive audience interest. Indeed, Proia had already underscored his mondo credentials by contributing the classic mondo *Mondo di Notte* (*Ecco* — see review). Yet as *Realta' Romanzesca* unfolds we discover that Proia has deployed the sequential montage of the film to create a free-form cinema experiment with powerful expressionistic tendencies. Expressionism should launch "an almost physical attack on the observer" according to R S Furness, and mondo films, especially the work of Proia in this field, certainly offer such thrills. Far from being standard presentations of weird and wonderful 'real' events the film offers a pungent display of generic qualities (fiction, documentary and travelogue) augmented with occasional philosophical diatribe and juvenile poetic sensibilities. The film recreates and re-

presents the stories to us in colourful form (Proia even thanks *Teletype* at the end the film for "making these stories up") and the scenes in the film are unapologetically staged. Proia used real thespians to act out the roles but at times the acting is histrionic, as if the director strove to convey realism through amateurism. This dubious quality merely adds humour to the project. The opening virtuoso sequence of the converging of characters (a second-hand furniture dealer, a motorcyclist, a truck-driver, a car full of Japanese businessmen, a commuter bus) towards a fatality in a southern French town, although ludicrous, is well staged, tense and captivating: "Ce'st la fin de la Monde!" cries an old man surveying the carnage. The film is expressionistic in the sense that it assaults the viewer with poetic abstractions of the 'true' event none more so than in the surreal tale of a jaded reporter who deploys the wonders of newly developing international travel to conduct a long-range affair. "I needed a vacation from war, famine, pestilence, sudden death" he recounts, wearily and bizarrely. The sequence uses the time-play made possible by judicious film editing to evoke the possibilities of love conducted at a distance and via transatlantic phone calls. The lovers meet in one location before jetting off again to another (New York, San Francisco, Honolulu, Honk Kong). These trips are used as metaphors for the mind expansion offered by drugs as the couple's participation at an LSD party vividly illustrates. Suddenly, the scene switches to philosophical musings on the existential state. "You can defy the clock and the sun...but you can't control fate", the man despairs launching the scene into another dimension. Driving to a final rendezvous in Paris the couple crash into each other and are killed. The meeting, helped by Ortolani's music, is delivered in the *giallo* style. The psychedelic overtones to this strange sequence are highlighted by the use of fragmented shots of the sky and clouds (to symbolize infinity) 'unrealistic colours' (another expressionist trope), and a posterisation filter applied to the final car crash, making it a Warhol-like disaster scenario amplified for screaming shock. In these scenes Proia employs colour deftly as opposed to conventional form and metaphor

This page ***Realta' Romanzesca.***

to express emotion.

However, more conventional mondo sequences are present: a San Franciscan experiment in cryonics appears complete with a space-age musical abstraction of the Celeste; there is computerised dating in Tokyo. Meanwhile the 'clan of the perfect wave' exhibits the usual mondo suspicion of youth culture. A surfer riffs on the endless quest for thrills, blonde girls are imaged, and a flute/bongo primitive jazz melody supplies a bohemian atmosphere. Yet almost all of these sequences bear traces of the avant-garde, whether through futuristic musical arrangements, sometimes inept shock tactics, and rough montage. Throughout the film the still image is used to disrupt the illusion of 'reality': at the end of the patently daft tale of the truck driver and Tony Soprano look-a-like Francesco Scarabotto and his unfaithful wife (the audience is left to imagine the fate of the adulterer as Scarabotto's discovery of him in bed with is wife leaps into monochrome stop-frame action — much like a *photo-roman*); the sexual fantasies of a Japanese loner are rendered through pin-up stills; an unsuccessful attempt by an Italian woman to wed her ailing fiancée before he dies ends with frozen portraits of her grief — the emotion of the moment of death imaged via freeze frame. "A freeze frame permits a gaze that is detached from the necessity for response or reaction" noted Thomas Sutcliffe, a near perfect account of such mondo voyeuristic tendency. The freeze frames in *Realta' Romanzesca* portray the imagination of remembered events — they are supposed to convey the spirit of newspaper (photo) journalism to the reading of the stories told. The crude and primitive way in which these stills are rendered is again expressionistic rather than realistic. Poetic narrative rears its head in another odd sequence about a female suicide ("Nulla — nothing" she cries at numerous intervals). Shots of the woman leaving her apartment in a negligee before racing off in her sports car recall Claude LeLouch's stylised romance classic, *Un Homme et une Femme*. As she is about to leap from a metal bridge a man grabs her, pulling her towards him. Their eyes meet and she has a change of heart about suicide. "Null La La!" is her punch line to the scene, and the bombastic ballad, Ha La Vita, plays.

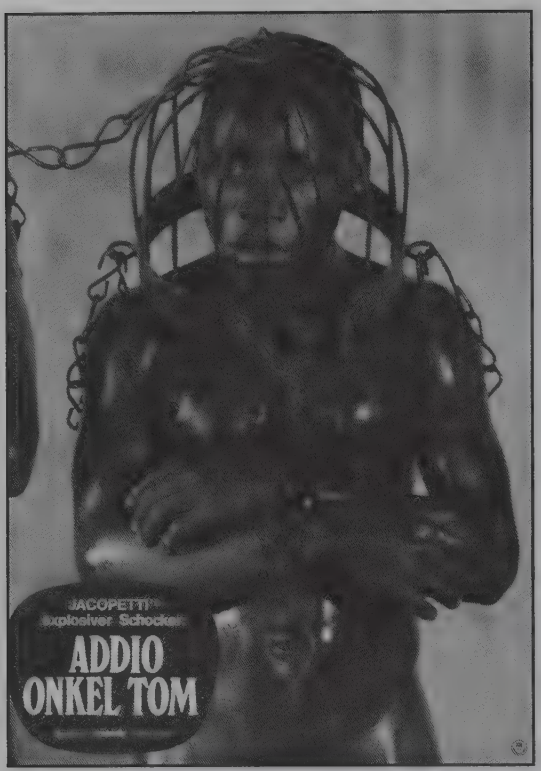
Composer Riz Ortolani has once again excelled producing a brilliant and innovative score for what is a largely uneven film. The music ranges from bossa nova to jazz, and the composer's arranging skills (particularly for orchestra) are exemplified often and with good effect. The final sequence, "the making of a folk hero", pulls out all the stops in this regard. To a swinging Fellini-esque march a young mini-skirted woman strides through Naples, accompanied by the usual taunts, glances and wolf-whistles. A bearded man sidles up close to her and proceeds to follow her into the caged lift of an apartment block. Once inside the man refuses to let the women free until she has stripped naked. As she

begins to do this a crowd of onlookers builds (they can see through the iron shutters of the lift), yelping and whooping with delight at this free and public sexual degradation. The music builds to increase the drama and tension of the scene as the man urges the girl on, goggle-eyed. The sexual politics of the mondo film are highlighted again in this climactic scene — the notion that a man becomes a 'folk hero' by forcing a woman to strip in public could only have been borne in an Italian, especially mondo, imagination.

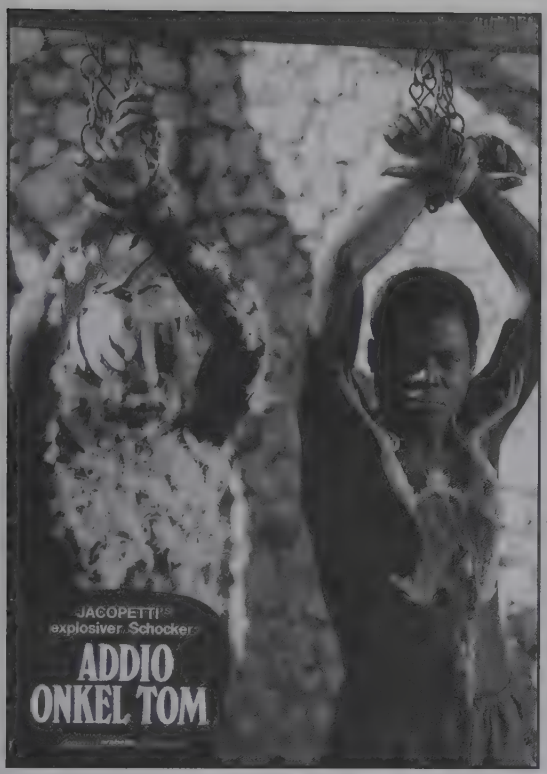
Addio Zio Tom

Dir: Gualtiero Jacopetti &
Franco Prosperi
Italy, 1971

□ Jacopetti and Prosperi's *Addio Zio Tom*, nearly the most supreme mondo film, is also one of the most staggering contributions to the history of film art. It is a film conceived in the same epic proportions as *Africa Addio* (perhaps the purest distillation of mondo filmmaking aesthetics/ethics), and attacks the history of a continent as vast and complex. Like *Africa Addio* the film has attracted waves of controversy which, if not as politically and socially deep, were profound in the shocks the film delivered to the institutions of cinema and anyone intrigued by film narratives that defy belief. Jacopetti and Prosperi retreated, stung emotionally by the vitriol *Africa Addio* provoked and physically drained by travelling across the world's vastest continent for four years, from the documentary form and entered the world of the historical reconstruction film. This approach to historical reinvention, pioneered most effectively by British director Peter Watkins, in the hands of Jacopetti and Prosperi, while making similar use of non-



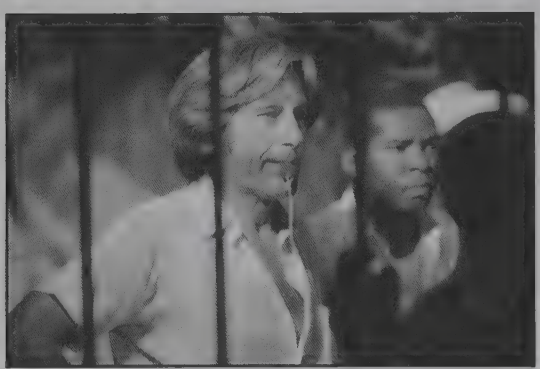
professional actors and crew as makeshift actors, and regularly closing in on the faces of those involved, turned instead into a twisted and hallucinogenic variant of Watkins' intricate social critiques (ironically Watkins was hounded for the shock elements in his film *The War Game* and soon after left his homeland to work and live abroad). The British *Monthly Film Bulletin* dismissed *Zio Tom* describing the film unfavourably as an "exposé journalism parody" of Watkins' work. Respected American critic, Pauline Kael, in *The New Yorker* magazine, also dismissed the film, famously describing Jacopetti and Prosperi as "perhaps the most devious and irresponsible filmmakers who have ever lived". Yet the very aspects of the film that offended in the past are those which now excite and mesmerize: the grand, sweeping helicopter shots of the opening titles, invading the cotton-pickers below; the Bruegel-like gargoyle features of the lynchpin characters; the guileless depictions of the sexual perversions and slow-motion violence of brutal slavery; the lurid tropes of psychedelic 1970s cinematic; the reflexive approach to the filmmaking process (used to praise the likes of Watkins' *Culloden* but to condemn *Zio Tom*) and the stream of consciousness adaptations of literary modes from Beecher-Stowe via Fanny Kemble to Malcolm X (the film's title, and some of its impetus is borrowed from J C Furnas' 1956 study *Goodbye to Uncle Tom*). Jacopetti and Prosperi are on record as acknowledging the 'failures' of the film, lamenting that they did not, at the time, include more 'contextual' information (Jacopetti's recently issued 'director's cut' of the film attempts to amend this). But arguably this is unnecessary self-flagellation. *Zio Tom* is certainly a difficult, demanding and disturbing film portrait of an embarrassing, shocking period in American history; the film mocks the frayed concepts of American freedom and democracy and maybe it is for this reason that the film has been hated for so long. Truly everything about the film is exaggerated, amplified and heightened — but rightly so; this was a disgusting and shameful part of history that needed to be 'felt' to be understood. At first glance the affiliations with radical black thought (Martin Luther King, Black Panther leaders such as Stokely Carmichael and the imagined slave testimonies of Leroy Jones and Nat Turner) seem odd and incongruous. Yet these accounts were delivered in a language of violence (and in Styron's case, Pulitzer Prize-winning *Confessions of Nat Turner,* formally a stream of consciousness narrative) and it is this same gut reaction that Jacopetti and Prosperi urge audiences to feel, really feel. *Zio Tom* deliberately pushed the language of cinema to the limits of endurance, to shake the audience into some form of disturbed awareness. As a social comment it may be flawed, but as a lived experience there are few like it in film history. The reflexivity of the film is obvious in the way that scenes swing from the past to the present day and back again via the imagined here and now. Parallels are drawn between the treatments



of black African slaves in the seventeenth century and treatment of Afro-Americans in the late 1960s/early 1970s. Events are linked and determined by each other. The memorable exchange between a 'contented' slave and the filmmakers (used for the Italian trailer for the film) illustrates this point precisely: a historical pathology paving way for the contradictions and difficulties of the historical present. As the 'crew' physically recoil from what this 'slave' is articulating they protest: "apologist...Uncle Tom!"

The considerations presented here on *Zio Tom* will be confined mostly to the original 1970s version of the film, devoid of the historical, documentary footage recently, as noted, reinstated. Important and interesting though this new edit is (with around thirteen minutes of 'real' documentary footage added and numerous cameos excised from the original cut) I want to consider the film as it was presented to audiences originally; if the film needs to be defended or reassessed then let us begin with the film viewed in those times past. This is the film that the memory still recovers.

Jacopetti and Prosperi's cinematic language, perfected and honed since *Mondo Cane*, offers the hideous pictures of world events past and present to us in a style that is unflinching, decadent and ambiguous. And so the opening shots of *Zio Tom*, a soft-focused portrait of the grand colonial mansions of the American South and their inhabitants are designed, like those of the colonial powers of white South Africa in *Africa Addio*, to evoke images of a bad dream: ghostly, ethereal, surreal. Are they happy images or gross and sickly images? The audience must respond and decide because the filmmakers here will not 'tell' you. Jacopetti said of this scene: "I believed it was enforcing the idea of the absurdity, the 'virtuality' — one would said today, of the situation" — a message one could extend to the entire film. The first formal scenes of the film introduce Jacopetti

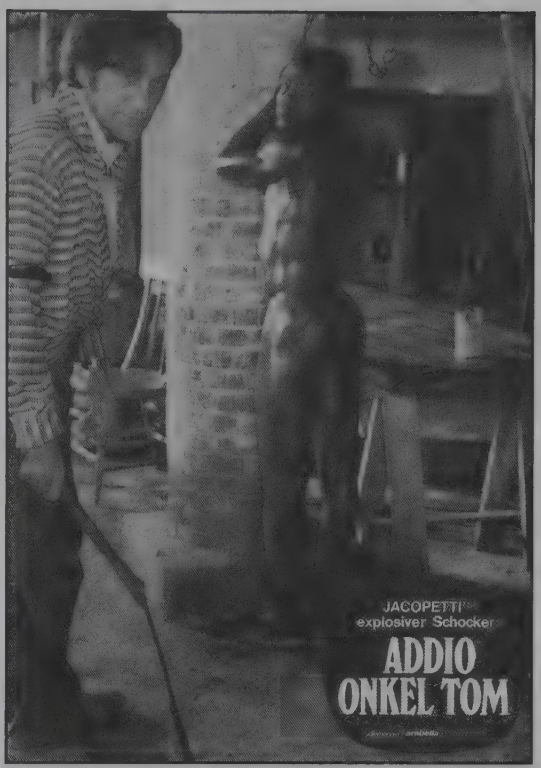


and Prosperi as cinejournalists ("travelling photographers" as they are later self identified on the side of a wagon) conducting an enquiry into the slave trade of the south, to a dinner audience of real historical characters (John Randolph, John Pithiou). This scene is shot via point of view camera work and we hear the voices of the crew interacting with the characters. These are the scenes that provoked disquiet in original reviews of the film, Jacopetti and Prosperi's mischievous black humour seemingly unappreciated. Scenes based on the shipment of slaves show the stinking brutality of this practice in all its gory details, complete with outbreaks of runny diarrhoea and dysentery, and forced feeding where blood flows out of the mouths of slaves together with a sickening combination of broken, rotten teeth and a disgusting porridge substance. The awfulness of the experience is contrasted with one of Riz Ortolani's trademark sweeping scores, this time a reworking of his *Flying Clipper/ Mediterranean Holiday* score, the evocation of high adventure and sea-bound freedom contrasting violently with the sub-animal cramped existence of the slaves. When the 'cargo' arrives at Louisiana to be 'processed' more horrors occur when slaves are caged (images for the promotion of the film originate from these shots), are fumigated and hung upside down to cure epilepsy (there are some excellent demonstrations of Climati's camerawork here), before being fed

cornmeal. In a suddenly absurd development, the white slaver protests to the camera "this is not an Italian restaurant!" There are more examples of Jacopetti and Prosperi's trademark counterpoint methods where a violent sequence recording the sexual abuse of black slaves by poor white plantation workers (known as "The Crackers") is scored with pomp rock music trimmings: a highly surreal moment. Another Jacopetti and Prosperi trademark is that of the 'ugly' character, and there are many examples in *Zio Tom* (almost always white — did the objections in the 1970s betray some racism of their own?). One of the most memorable is a Germanic plantation worker looking on with scorn at the public castration of a black 'rapist'. The screams of the victim blend with her gaping, mocking, hideous, laugh as her mouth devours the entire screen. In her classic anti-slavery journal, English actress Fanny Kemble depicted the sordidness of the southern white slavers; *Zio Tom* simply visualizes this cinematically. By now it is noticeable that the cinematography in *Zio Tom* is superb: shot by Antonio Climati, with his trademark wide-angled close-ups and long tracking shots (and combinations of the two) this time augmented by the work of Claudio Cirillo who beautifully, if controversially, recreated these landscapes of this history of death and murder in the Haitian nightmare paradise of dictator François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier.

The by-now-common jarring edit takes place when a brief refuge in a modern-day New Orleans funeral is interrupted with a solemn bell tolling as an introduction to a critique of how the Protestant church of the time peddled racist ideology: "slavery is a divine institution ordered and sanctioned by god". As ever, the cuts determine and shape the viewer's shock reflexes.

The documentary reflexivity of the film, another commonly derided aspect, occur in moments when the camera crew interact with the on-screen characters (and to a lesser degree to those who recognise the



key crew members Jacopetti, Prosperi and location manager Giampaolo Lomi playing characters): the Georgian mansion where the mammy of the house tells the crew, as they track past her, to "shush!"; the slave market at New Orleans where one of the administrators borrows a ball-point pen from behind the camera. The foetid stench of racism permeates the entire film no more so than the section on white sexual slavery and perversion — jaded white plantation owners ritually abuse young black girls — and that of the various 'scientific' justifications of racial theory — i.e. Professor Cartwright who has 'studied' black physiogimy and concluded that black cranial capacity, sweat, hair and eyes all point to "an inferior race". The 'perverse politics' of the mondo film play

Previous page & this page **Jacopetti and the filming of *Addio Zio Tom*.**

out in the slave markets where black bodies of all persuasion are marketed for the sexual appetites of white rulers: a large, sweaty man called Buzz, oils naked female slaves before they are auctioned; a dwarf called 'The General' parades "virgin whores" for the camera in an exotically photographed pornographic/voyeuristic segment that raises the audiences confused stimulated/repulsed emotional responses; and a stereotypically camp homosexual responsible for the 'sexual freaks' (one statuesque black has "three balls"). At a wax museum, Madame La Laurie sexually exploits blacks, male and female, to satisfy her Sadeian impulses. Then an underage girl prostitute begins to seduce the filmmaker/cameraman in a wilfully uncomfortable alienation scenario: the viewer appears to get into bed with the girl. Uncomfortable viewing — and it should be. The sexual mistreatment of blacks reaches is zenith at the stud farm of Mr Bighorn who 'breeds' slaves like dogs (he refers to the women as bitches/wenches and the men as studs). The violent animalistic rape of a new 'virgin' girl heralds the climax of the film and instils a vengeful fury sated by the subsequent horrific massacres of Nat Turner's imagination, transposed to the present day. In the context of the time the 'black power'-style revenge for all of this misery, abuse, violence and death is designed to act as a supportive gesture towards civil rights movements and their antecedents (this seems to have also been ignored in reviews of the day). This violent, surreal and anti-narrative finale is probably the best moment in the film and would be unrepeatable now (although echoes of the film style are located in Jodorowsky's trippy Zen western *El Topo* made around the same time) infused as they are with horror, psychedelia, testimony and fear. The slow-motion Peckinpah-style violence of the scenes echoes the blood splattered 'human' hunting trip depicted earlier in reverse; this time the blacks are the hunters. Here, violence is stylised and deployed by Jacopetti and Prosperi as an antidote to or reaction against the 'real' violence of documentary news reportage and mainstream cinema traditions, perfectly in accordance with Peckinpah's own philosophy: "to negate violence it must be shown for what it is: a horrifying brutalizing, destructive, ingrained part of humanity". You may be sickened by these images and words and sounds but they are located within a cruel reality and therefore must be (in)digested openly and honestly. As well as the slow-motion moments the Miami sequence includes a kaleidoscope of other cinematic effects: shock cuts, contrasts between temporal 'reality' and slow-motion 'fantasy', soft focus, voice-over effects, daylight horror/gore etc. Part of the sequence where two black militants/slaves, updated from the Nat Turner testimony, have axed a family to death, and then proceed to ransack their apartment, recall Antonioni's beautiful, poetic, slow-motion explosions of consumer durables in *Zabriskie Point*. The whites in this scene are made grossly evil by shooting them as idealised, advertising language images. The most haunting scene (which has been reinstated in the director's cut) features some shots of a space launch as Cape Canaveral in Florida. As we watch shots of rockets launching the narrator warns whites of "running away from the past" a bitter and accusatory condemnation of technological capitalist 'advancement' being used as attempt to deny and repress the grim reality of historical materialism and a warning to the future.

Jacopetti and Prosperi's parting shot of the film that: "This film is a documentary. The events occurred in history and the characters really existed" only muddies the waters. It seems from history that you will find *Zio Tom* compulsive, fascinating, awful viewing or stomach-churning exploitation. Whether this is in reference to the original or to the director's cuts is immaterial; you either get the malevolent terrifying beauty of *Zio Tom* and its ugly message or you don't.

The Frame of Mondo

"every incredible scene is real"

The scenes are so terrifying and horrific that at times one has to look away from the screen
Domenica del Corriere review of Africa Addio

Africa Addio

THE CONCEPT and practice of framing in any documentary film means the construction of specific codes, practices and meanings in an attempt at telling a story in a particular manner. According to documentary filmmaker and theorist Michael Rabiger: "the message... for documentary (film) makers is that framing is arranged — as far as is legitimate — according to an interpretation of the subject's meaning; composition helps define the subtext". In documentary and ethnographic film, codes are used to convey strong meaning about the subject(s) whether these are Bill Nichols' 'documentary modes of representation' (expositional; observational; interactive; reflexive; performative) or Michael Renov's 'poetic tendencies' (to record; to persuade or promote; to analyse or interrogate; to express).

The film camera exists as a substitute for human movement, hand held cameras in the *cinéma vérité* movement emphasised this. Such techniques, taken up by Antonio Climati

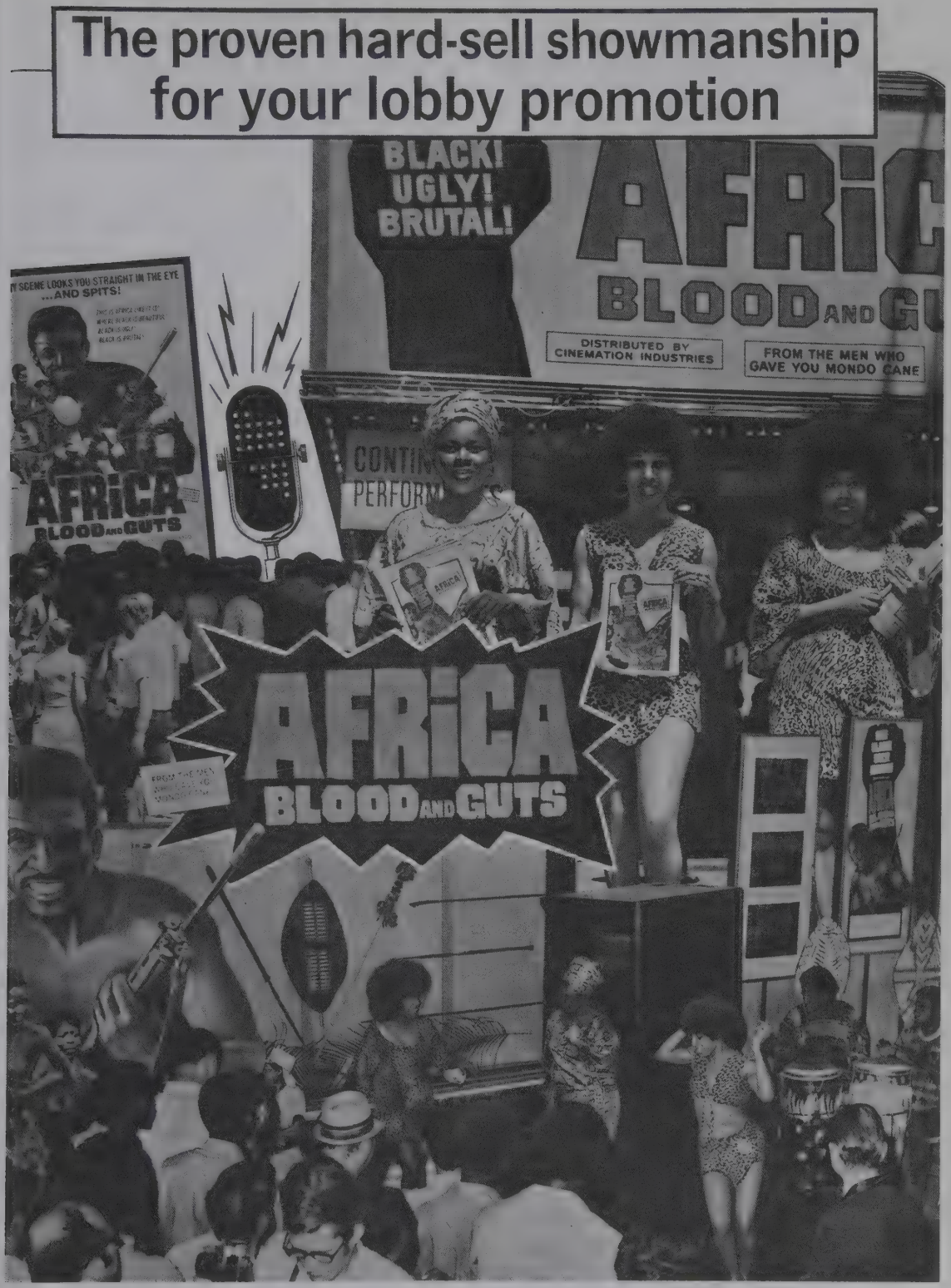
and Benito Frattari and then others, in mondo films were driven to extremes; a direct and thrilling, if controversial, perversion of the attributes normally found in documentary/ ethnographic filmmaking modes. In his book, *Ethnographic Film,* Karl Heider posits what he calls "attribute dimensions" against which films 'ethnographic status' can be verified. Those forbidden, and those which mondo film flagrantly celebrate, are fragmentation; inappropriate use of music; the denial of the presence of the filmmaker; images and acts shown out of context; people depicted as "only faceless masses"; distortion of temporal aspects. Critical to the manner in which mondo films transgress these 'rules' is the way that they are framed and shot, the ways in which the subjects of mondo documentary are recorded and presented to audiences.

Filmmakers are limited and bound by the cinema screen and its sharply defined 'frame'. Attempts at overcoming this have included the introduction of larger format film stocks, and processes such as Cinerama, CinemaScope and TechniScope. The latter of these processes was used most effectively by mondo directors particularly and spectacularly in Jacopetti and Prosperi's *Africa Addio*, an exemplar of mondo framing devices, where not only did the 'scope' of the subject (a feature film survey of the upheavals of large sections of an vast continent) warrant such framing, but immersion of the spectator into this often frightening and shocking 'reality' demanded that the screen and the frame be suitably immense. In his book on *Africa Addio*, John Cohen defines this as a 'new' approach to the documentary film where film "presents reality "as big as life'".

Climati's approach to capturing moments of such realities regularly bordered on the insane. Consider the attempts made during *Africa Addio* by Jacopetti, Nievo and Climati to record a military mutiny and racist mass killing of Arabs by black Africans in Dar es Salaam. As it is seen in the film, and recorded in the book of the film, the drive to capture good pictures of such African horrors almost resulted in death:

"The camera has barely a second to photograph the scene, for as the soldiers spot the car they wave it off. Jacopetti, who is driving, backs out slowly to give Climati as much time to film as possible. But the slowness enrages one soldier who rushes up to the car, raises his rifle over his head, and smashes it down butt-first into the windscreen... The glass shatters and fragments spray across Jacopetti's face, cutting a vein behind his ear...He stops the car, but Climati keeps his camera rolling. Two soldiers jerk the door open and haul Jacopetti out. Climati, ensconced in the back seat, relentlessly films the whole sequence — Jacopetti being pulled away, the side of his head streaming with blood, turning his face back to the car to shout more instructions". "Climati kept filming until they reached into the car and grabbed him too" recalled Jacopetti of this bizarre event, an excellent portrait of the madness required to create the stunning pictures exhibited throughout the film. The dangers of capturing these moments on film in this manner came vividly to life when a report in the Italian journal *L'Espresso* accused the Italian crew of colluding with mercenaries (trying to recapture the Congo town Boende from rebel groups) in order to get 'better pictures':

"...the South African mercenary Ben Louw...put his finger on the trigger of his machine gun and then, instead of shooting, turned round towards the first truck less than ten metres behind him, saw Climati the cameraman, who was looking through his camera, eye to the aperture, hands on the focus finder; saw Nievo and Jacopetti at Climati's side...leaning on the tripod to keep it as steady as possible; and asked him if they were "ready". But they weren't. The rebels had appeared suddenly far down the road, and they were much too far away to be photographed without changing the lens. And there was no time to lose because Louw was in a hurry. Louw turned around for


The proven hard-sell showmanship
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the second time, then a third, cursing and saying that he was going to shoot anyway; but at that moment Climati signalled with his hand for Louw to go ahead. The Arriflex rolled together with the machine-gun mechanism...the rebels fell onto the road"

Although this account, by the journalist and former protégée of Jacopetti Carlo Gregoretti was later refuted by Jacopetti (and disproved after a bitter Italian court case) a vivid portrait remains of the camera acting like a gun and of the obsessive, aggressive nature of this type of cinematography. Jacopetti once described Climati as a "human dolly", "he was able to do on his own what normally you would need many machines and many people to achieve", a weird embodiment of Jean Rouch's 'direct-cinema cameraman' those that "know how to walk with their cameras...becoming the living cameras, the 'cine-eye' of Vertov", and his fluid, restless camera work is certainly one of the principle, irrefutable features of the mondo aesthetic (*Zio Tom* production manager Giampaolo Lomi also once spoke to me of his amazement at Climati's dedication to obtaining startling film images).

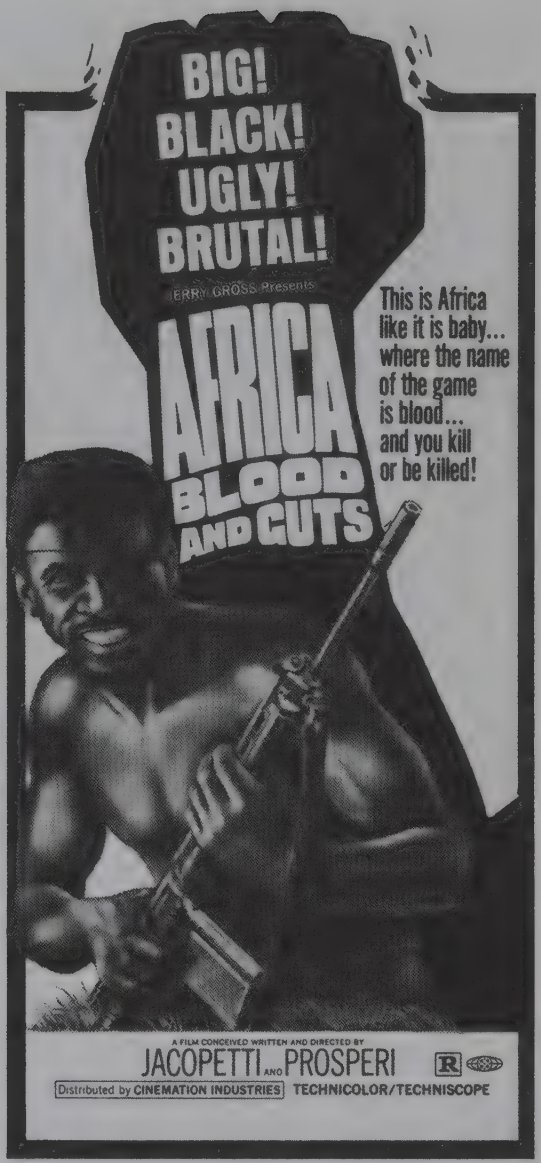
The anamorphic stretching distortion of the TechniScope mondo film tries to compensate for the limits of the film screen/frame, instead immersing the audience right into the action. This works in the landscape shots of *Africa Addio*, *Zio Tom* etc. but also paradoxically in the extreme close-ups where faces loom large, occasionally beautiful, and sometimes hideous into our mental or even physical space. Climati's work encompasses both of these attributes; the panorama of a helicopter shot of a landscape and the violent thrusting of human facial landscapes working as one. "Good close-ups are lyrical..." Béla Bálasz once observed "...reflected expressions of our own subconscious feeling" and in the mondo film it is this notion of the '(camera) eye as the gateway to the strange dimensions of the soul' that is sought after vigorously. Bálasz's notion of the "silent soliloquy" where film faces reveal the depths of human emotion often without speaking literally can be amply found in the cinematography of mondo. Italian cinema understands this completely anyway as Clint Eastwood observed from working with Leone: "Leone believed...as a lot of Italian director's do, that the face means everything".

Composition of shots becomes paramount and the shape of the widescreen image dictates the pictorial use of space, that which, according to Ralph Stevenson and J R Debrix, creates "an architecture, an equilibrium, a meaning". Yet also critical to the frame of mondo is the relationship between the composition and movement within these compositions. And one of the most notable attributes of this in the mondo film is the use of the zoom. Climati is a master of this too and his technique has been widely copied in subsequent (especially Italian) mondo films. The zoom in mondo films is a framing device used for visual punctuation, a trait that often irritated reviewers (especially British) of mondo films weaned on the solemn neo-realism/*vérité* approach to documentary filmmaking (Italian film generally exhibits a more relaxed attitude to such alienation effects: de Sica and Bertolucci being just two directors happy to deploy the zoom to simulate violent emotion). Climati also makes use in his work with Jacopetti of the 'reverse' zoom, a device that moves from the specific to the general in a dizzying physical manner. This enhances sequences of extreme violence such as the animal harvests in *Africa Addio* where the camera follows the trajectory of the high-powered bullet towards the unknowing animal victim, and the blank, sullen stares of Mau Mau detainees. A relation of the zoom is the zip-pan (or swish pan or whip shot), a very fast turn that is used in mondo as a device to blur sensations and switch between scenarios. Then oblique framing occurs when Climati swirls around subjects (the suspended slaves and dream sequences of *Zio Tom*), or shoots from below or within figures (the simulated Zulu rituals *Africa Addio*).

The violence of the camera perspective,

what Carol J Clover, discussing the horror film, defines as an "assaultative gaze", the effect the camera has of violating and attacking the subject, either imaginatively (as in fantasy of horror) or in 'reality' (accusations levelled at *Africa Addio*) is a powerful concept. In recalling that the Italian title for the British voyeur-thriller *Peeping Tom* is *L'Occhio Uccide* ('the eye that kills') and Clover connects this form of cine-voyeurism, a strong feature of Italian horror in particular (see the threateningly subjective camerawork in Andrea Bianchi's *Nude per L'Assassino* for example) with mondo methodology. In making *L'Occhio Selvaggio* (*The Wild Eye*), Paolo Cavara was exploring precisely this troublesome aspect of the intrusive world of the mondo cameraman, his apparatus, what he shows us and what we see (in our own minds).

This terror mode, arguably the definitive, long-lasting effect of mondo cinema reached its apogee in Climati's own mid-period mondo creation *Ultime Grida dalla Savana* (Climati later recreated certain aspects of his craft in *Natura Contro* but these images were a pale imitation of his greatest work). By describing the film as a "beautifully filmed hymn to death", the reviewer offers a fitting tribute to the cinematographic framing and composition of the mondo film and its prime exponent.



Africa Addio

Dir: Gualtiero Jacopetti & Franco Prosperi
Italy, 1965

After a century of colonization let us not forget that it is partially a deformed image of our own selves that... reflects back at us
Barbet Schroeder

Our shooting will be done with cameras, not with guns
Armand Denis

□ Charles Kilgore once described Jacopetti and Prosperi's *Africa Addio* as "the *Moby Dick* of mondo movies" and it is not hard, given the film's grandiose ambition (the crew covered more than 130,000 miles across one of the world's largest continents), its length (over 139 minutes), and the personal cost (three years), to see why. The bold moral ambiguity of the film has ensured that the reception for the film has been, since it was released, difficult. *Africa Addio* tends

to invite polarisation: the Italian Socialist newspaper *Avanti* argued the film was "photographed through a distorted lens...an orgy of sadism and fascist racism" while the Conservative *Il Tempo* found the film "a remarkable piece of reportage...excellently shot and conceived". At a screen talk in 2003 with Jacopetti the audience seemed divided as to whether the film showed great courage in critiquing many aspects of African independence or was biased, selective and distorted. Most importantly, Jacopetti and Prosperi refused to participate in what John Cohen describes as the two "conspiracies concerning Africa": the first is that Africans are incapable of governing themselves and are making a mess of everything; the second is a refusal to acknowledge the turmoil and confusion in Africa (then and arguably still now) for fear of 'offending' the emerging African independence movements. According to Cohen, Jacopetti and Prosperi "participated in neither of these conspiracies". And what *Africa Addio* does, very powerfully, is to portray this turmoil, and other aspects of this vital historical phase, in a film that is somehow a 'beautiful' image of the "agony" of a continent in violent transition.

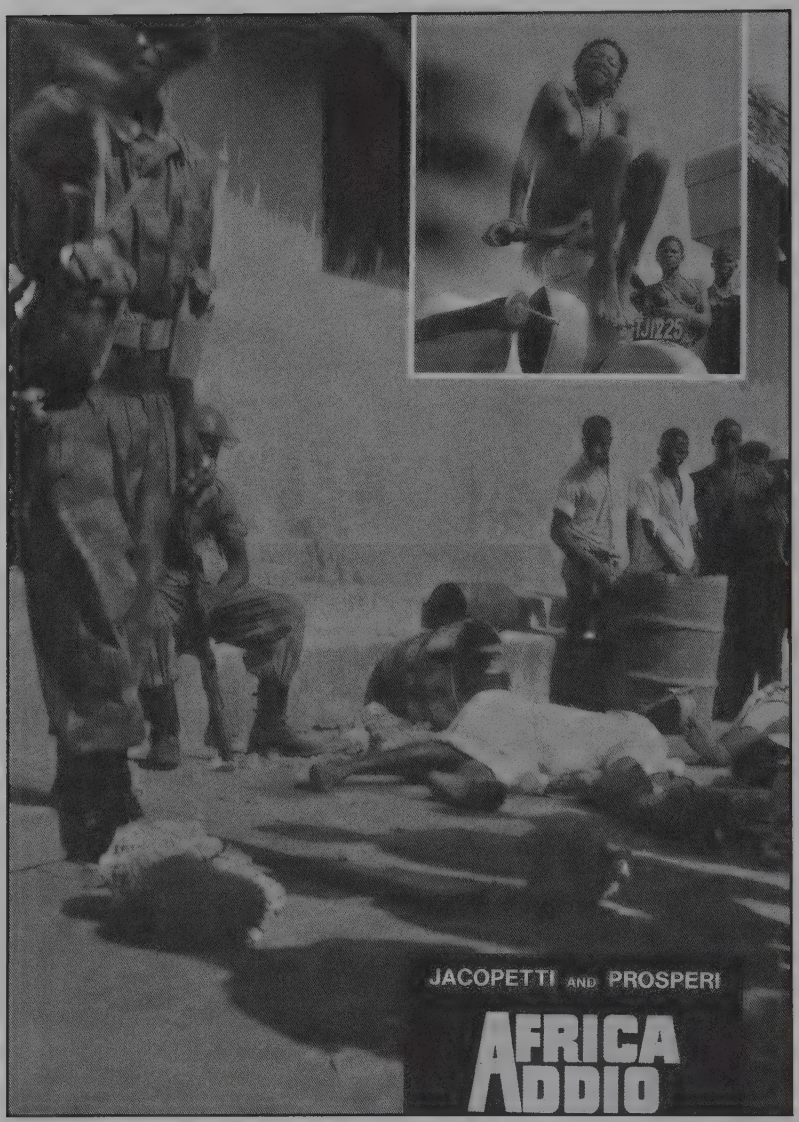
The ferocious hatred aimed at the film when it was released was notable, both in reviews by the 'liberal' west and in the revolutionary critiques of Third Cinema, where postcolonial theorists such as Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas harshly denounced the project ("the more exploited a man is...the more he resists, the more he is viewed as a beast. This can be seen in *Africa Addio* by the fascist Jacopetti; the African savages, killer animals, wallow in abject anarchy once they escaped from their white protection. Fantasy has been replaced by phantoms, and man is turned

into an extra who dies so Jacopetti can comfortably filmed his execution" they wrote in *Towards a Third Cinema*). As recently as 1994 Kenneth M Cameron in *Africa on Film* labelled the film a "low" and "sensational" non-fiction film (as opposed to a "high" and "environmental" one). Despite this, *Africa Addio* remains Jacopetti and Prosperi's best film, the pinnacle of mondo filmmaking and one of the most powerful cinematic documents ever made.

Africa Addio was set against a backdrop of literary and film portraits of the 'dark continent' mostly imbued with nineteenth century colonialist beliefs. These were the ideologies perpetuated by the myths of colonisation, the heroic adventures of Stanley, Churchill et al. These are the myths that Jacopetti and Prosperi, spurred into action by a letter from an English fried Carolyn Thompson (alerting Jacopetti to the brutal change taking place in Africa) desperately wanted to explore and portray.

In fellow Italian Alberto Moravia's accounts of travels in Africa, *Which Tribe do You Belong To?* the ancient myths of Africa fade and die (or at least transmogrify) before the writer's eyes. In articulating the violent changes being thrust upon Africa — "we have moved away from the old colonialism with its decaying bungalows, its Victorian hotels, its slave-owner's bars, its dusty shops, and indeed its Conrad-like picturesqueness" — Moravia was echoing the images and sounds of *Africa Addio*. If *Africa Addio* owes anything to these colonial assumptions it is more like the assessment of the colonial myths as elucidated by Sven Lindqvist, whose brilliant account of the psychotic violence of the British imperial project, *Exterminate All the Brutes* argues a similarly bleak pathology of the colonisation of Africa. For Lindqvist

Previous page & this page ***Africa Addio.***



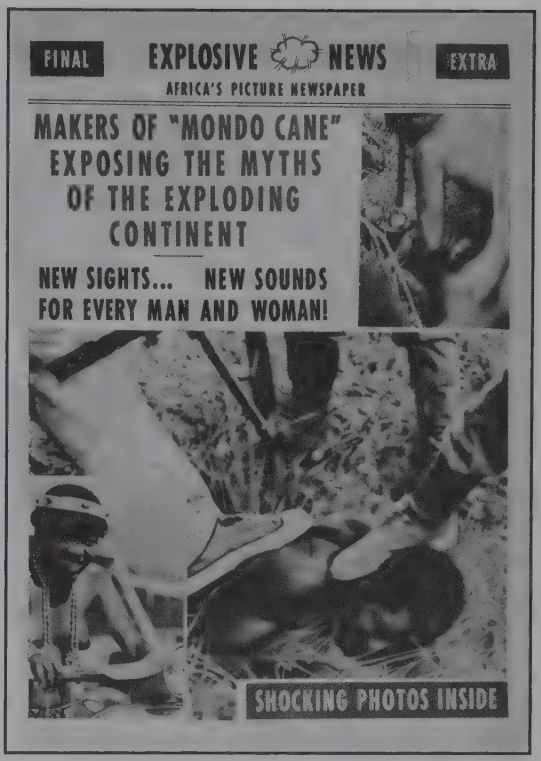
the work of Conrad reveals a grim portrait of the true evils of empire and *Africa Addio*, in its savage critique, offers the same ugly truism; it forces us, the audience, to reflect and be shamed by our disgusting history. The film was not even released in France, despite an expensive translation job and a lush, full colour article on the film for *Paris Match*, due to political pressure imposed onto the producer Angelo Rizzoli by the De Gaulle government concerned with France's own 'colonial' problems in Algeria. Most damagingly the accusations levelled at Jacopetti and Prosperi of "voluntary homicide" (in response to the Carlo Gregoretti claims in *L'Espresso*) although later thrown out of court, along with the subsequent political wranglings over the content and production of the film, restricted its proper reception. The reputation of *Africa Addio*, therefore has always preceded any sensible or careful analysis of the film's contents.

So Jacopetti and Prosperi from the outset were keen to capture and expose the fragmentation of myths of colonial and postcolonial Africa.

Indeed this is expressed in the film's opening vista of a handing over ceremony in Kenya. As the standards of the coloniser and the colonised are exchanged the camera suddenly zooms in and freeze frames on the two hands — one black, one white — the moment accentuated by the dramatic, violent stabs of the score. It is a jolting moment of ritual, exchange and hostility. The opening text of the film then outlines the philosophy behind the realisation of the film beautifully:

"The Africa of the great explorers, the huge land of hunting and adventure, adored by entire generations of children has disappeared forever. To that age -old Africa, swept away and destroyed by the tremendous speed of progress, we have said farewell. The devastation, the slaughter, the massacres which we assisted belong to a new Africa — one which if it emerges from it's ruins to be more modern, more rational, more functional, more conscious — will be unrecognisable. On the other hand the world is racing towards better times. The new America rose from the ashes of a few white men, all the redskins and the bones of million of buffalo. The new carved up Africa will rise again upon the tombs of a few white men, millions of black men and upon those immense graveyards that were once its game reserves. The endeavour is so modern and recent that there is no room to discuss it at the moral level. The purpose of this film is only to bid farewell to the old Africa that is dying and entrust to history the documentation of its agony."

This philosophy is further exemplified by the subsequent scenes giving Africa 'back to the Africans'. The idea of Africa entering the modern world is demonstrated by the adoption of new technologies (microphones for electioneering) and new 'democratic' leaders. The peoples that sit transfixed by these new leaders are represented as 'peasants' — still backward and awaiting enlightenment. "Europe is leaving in a hurry and on tiptoe...just at the moment when Africa needs it the most...even if it has given far more than it has taken" accuses


FINAL
EXPLOSIVE NEWS
EXTRA
AFRICA'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER
MAKERS OF "MONDO CANE" EXPOSING THE MYTHS OF THE EXPLODING CONTINENT
NEW SIGHTS... NEW SOUNDS FOR EVERY MAN AND WOMAN!
SHOCKING PHOTOS INSIDE

the narration, thus articulating Jacopetti's wry take on the momentous events unfolding before the camera lens. This next section of the film deals in contrasts to represent this changeover in its rapidity: in Kenya the chaotic, wild street celebrations of the new black independence is contrasted with the almost silent solemnity of white church services; the new black army "marches in" aggressively while the English colonial regiments parade out" (with accompanying pompous military music). At a reception garden party the 'symbiosis' of the old whites and the new blacks is visually illustrated with shots of two women both sporting enormous buckteeth. Later in the film the contrast is highlighted between South Africa, "sanctuary of the whites" (shot in the sickly style of a shampoo commercial) with Zulu tribes (the

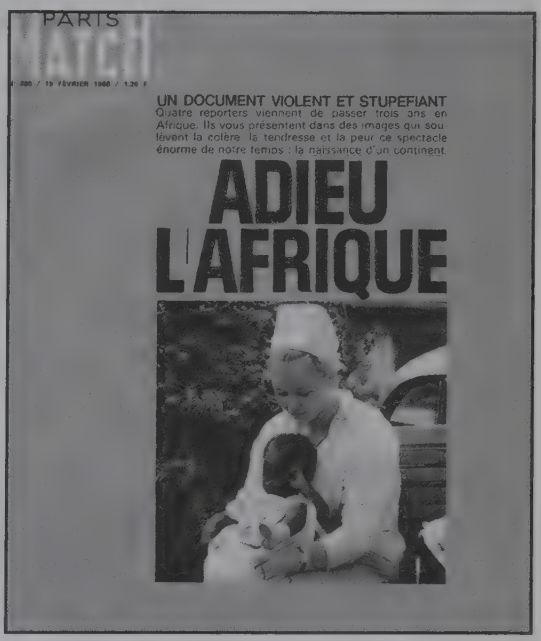
Previous page & this page ***Africa Addio.***

camera here shooting low and thrusting from behind emphasising the 'primitive' rhythms of black cultures). By cleverly manipulating the techniques offered by the film art: framing, musical score, and narration, political, albeit sensational demarcations are made. At the finale of the film the black poverty of 'apartheid', workers in the gold and diamond mines, is contrasted with the wealth the white population makes from the international trading of these materials.

The film throughout is terrifyingly beautiful and the use of Technicolor and the widescreen process Techniscope are stunning. Rarely has a film about a certain location of the world been so luxuriously visualised using the film camera. In contrast to the common vérité belief of the epoch that documentary needs to be rendered in monochrome, the colour process here greatly heightens the impact of the scenes, and is also exploited in the material associated with the film: graphics, press material, posters (the *Monthly Film Bulletin* however, claimed the beauty of the shots compromised the "impartiality" of the film). This 'creativity' may be a troubling aspect for documentary purists but is arguably the reason why the film is so fascinating when assessed today. The camerawork of Antonio Climati is superb throughout, even when he is stuck within helicopters, filming from the air, or shooting from fast moving cars. The shots are exquisitely composed and worthy in themselves of the Donatello David (the Italian version of an Oscar) the film eventually received. Inventive compositions, include Vaseline-lensed portraits of the events resulting from the white exodus from East Africa (farms and land being sold to black Africans) and the recollections of Mau Mau atrocities (the sites of 'terrorist' massacres

of whites are eerily imaged), extensive use of zooms, intrusive close-ups and glossily picturesque location shots. A particularly vivid example of this is the footage of a young zebra being rescued by the Wildlife Society along the Zambezi river, which ends with the unfortunate animal being air-lifted out by helicopter against a vibrant orange sunset — one of the most iconic images of the film. Moravia's observation that "In Africa the aeroplane is more revealing than the car", was put to effective cinematic use. Many of the aircraft shots assist in either the panorama of the landscape (Cape Town) or the horror of decolonisation (Zanzibar) — and sometimes both. The film is again edited brilliantly using the familiar devices of the shock cut (the depiction of the East African 'animal harvests', "operation cropping" where exotic images of the imagined old Africa violently explode with the carnage and bloodshed of elephants, hippos and gazelle being shot to pieces). The commentary arguing "the truth is that in all of Africa there is only one truly ferocious animal: man" hints at an ecological argument being presented by the filmmakers, known for their interest in conservation. In addition, the score, composed by Riz Ortolani, is still acknowledged as one of his best. As well as the use of his trademark lush orchestrations which add emotion to events, and his ability to connote filmic genre traits (Wild West, comedy) his mesmerising symphony of terror for the Acholi animal slaughter scenes, where each blade and bullet moves synchronously with the music was a unique, virtuoso piece of film scoring.

Two sequences in particular strengthen the notion that not only was *Africa Addio* in fact an accurate portrait of the times but that it was prescient in its warnings of both the corruption taking place within the new African leaderships and the interference of outside powers (the politics of the 'Cold War') in such socio-political vacuums. The first represents the slaughter of the Watutsi tribe by the Hutu in Rwanda, a tribal yet


PARIS
MATCH
UN DOCUMENT VIOLENT ET STUPEFIANT
Quatre reporters viennent de passer trois ans en Afrique. Ils vous présentent dans des images qui soulèvent la colère, la tendresse et la peur ce spectacle énorme de notre temps : la naissance d'un continent
ADIEU L'AFRIQUE

colonially affected act of reprisal and revenge. Various gory scenes illustrate this tragic picture: a pile of fifty-two severed Watutsi hands found in a hidden forest location; the Kagera river overflowing with rotting corpses. These are eventually burnt on a hilltop bonfire in a perversely picturesque silhouette image shot.

The second concerns the events in the former Belgium Congo in November 1964

Previous page & this page ***Africa Addio.***

where the town of Boende had been looted and captured by communist-backed Simba rebel groups. The new leadership of Moise Tshombe employed mercenaries (*Les Affreux* — the horrors) to help recapture the town and Jacopetti was there to film it. The tragic circularity of such killings is described in the film thus:

"Africa has no fallen soldiers on either side — it only has corpses. It's an absurd and tragic dance that's been going on for five years now. Whites against blacks, and blacks against whites. They take turns killing and dying, like a cruel children's game. No one wins and no one loses, once and for all. No condition is definitive except for white and black deaths that together infect the ruins and dissolve, amidst the buzz of flies, into absolute biological equality."

This demonstrates that such aspects of African history repeat themselves with tragic monotony. "Africa Addio still exists, it is still relevant today. This comforts me immensely" Jacopetti stated recently. His intuition of the future, the "picture of this agony", is now there for all to see.

There are, however, lighter, more traditionally 'mondo' aspects to the film. A sequence on foxhunting in Kenya, where the British imperialists, because there are no foxes in Kenya, hunt instead a black houseboy dragging dead meat (we see women applying lipstick as the opening of the scene) is reminiscent of earlier Jacopetti/Prosperi stylistics. There is even an amusing scene critiquing the new mass media image of Africa being sold to the world. A pulsating Zulu tribal dance is revealed, as the camera pulls out, to be the invention of an English film crew attempting to simulate the 'old Africa' before as it disappears. The 'new Africa' is revealed through shots depicting the dancers changing from their 'traditional costume' into modern fashions before they drive off in fast modern cars and motorcycles. The African girls are peeped at through the gaps in a thatched tent as the commentary observes:

"The African female has discovered she is a woman and is beginning to behave as such. She wants to be modern because she feels that the past is against her. When she was naked, she had two mammary glands.

Now that she is clothed she has two breasts. She does not want to display herself. She wants to be looked at to make you guess what's under her alluring clothes. She covers her intimacy not out of modesty but to be flirtatious. She undresses to surrender, and dresses to attack. Naked, she was prey, like a black female. Clothed she is a tyrant like a white woman. Africa covers itself consciously and all wrapped up in the veils of its consciousness, Africa disappears"

The female body is used as a metaphor, a symbol of 'pure Africa' for the changing continent. This is not to say that the (vaguely sexist) caricature of these representations was not attributed to white populations too. Examples of Moravia's construct of the colonialist Protestant "homo Victorianus" are amply displayed (the authorities holding the Mau Mau trials, Sir Richard Turnbull, the last governor of "the last outpost of empire" Tanganyika etc.) where the English are mocked as arrogant, upper-crust eccentrics, unconcerned with the effects of their imperialist actions and speaking with daft, clipped accents. In constructing the film Jacopetti and Prosperi transgressed the practical rules of sensitive, ethical documentary filmmaking. Frequently they resorted to bribes, manipulation and deception to secure their footage and the suspicion with which documentary subjects regard cine-journalists had to be faced up to (Moravia, again in *Which Tribe...?* observed this tendency: his photographing of a group of women from Chad was criticised by young nationalists witnessing the event as "neo-colonialist").

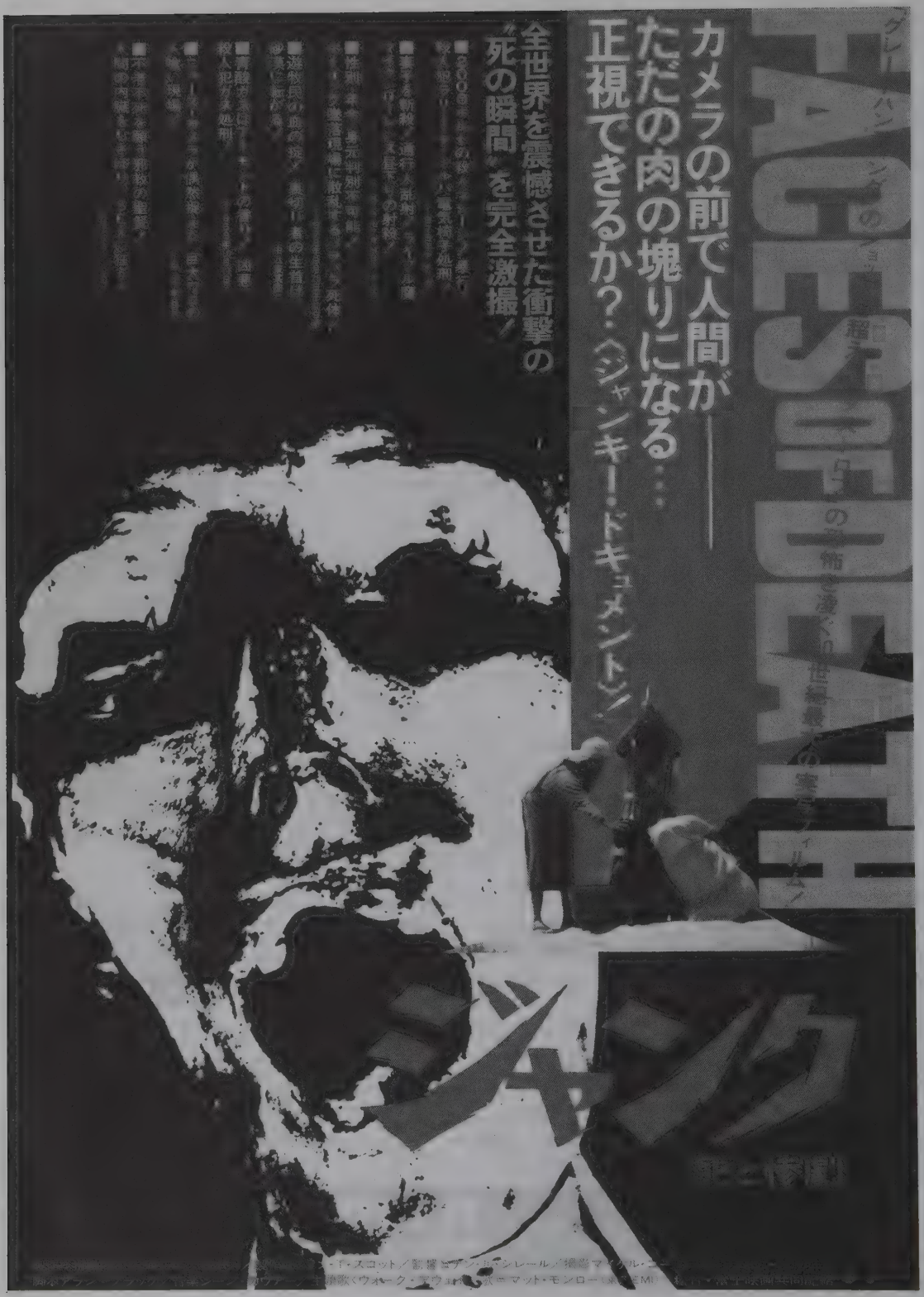
At the end of the film, after a typical Jacopettian comparison between the history of penguins isolated on a lost continent, and the history of the white colonialist invaders of that continent, Jacopetti and Prosperi offered the following conclusion:

"This film, born without prejudice does not attempt and has never attempted to create new ones. It has only tried to document the reality of how blood spilled anywhere represents a loss of wealth for the entire world."

Sadly it seems that the world of cinema and the broader geo-political strata has paid scant regard to the concerns raised in *Africa Addio,* and this is the ultimate 'failure' of what is in reality an unforgettable documentary film experience.

The unfortunate postscript to *Africa Addio* is that the film was re-released in 1971 by the ridiculous, American Jerry Gross organisation. This version, a hideously truncated and hyper-sensationalist version was re-titled *Africa Blood and Guts* with the tagline "every scene looks you in the eye, and spits". The promotional devices alone for the selling of the film, incorporating black American actors dressed as Zulus, were laughably offensive — an extreme reading of the already shameless exploitation textbook. A myth has also developed that in this version it was the historical or contextual material that was excised. It is rather that a random collection of scenes (the Mau Mau trials for example) have been removed from the film solely to make it 'sellable' to the limited attention spans of US audiences, both theatrically and subsequently on domestic video release. The magnificence of the original film image was lost in this cheap, risible 'translation'. One needs only to view the trailer, with its preposterous growling voice-over, to understand the contempt (Jacopetti described it as a "betrayal") with which all those involved in the production of the film view the exercise.

Previous page & this page **Two shots of *Africa Addio* from within the filmmakers' car.**


FACES OF DEATH
カメラの前で人間が——
ただの肉の塊りになる…
正視できるか？〈ジャンキー・ドキュメント〉！
全世界を震撼させた衝撃の
"死の瞬間"を完全激撮！
ジャンク

Animals in Mondo Film

"a slow-motion hymn to dying"

Faces of Death

Do movie patrons want the guts of reality in their documentaries? Here they get them: literally, and with the trimmings too
Parker Tyler

Violence is a form of objectivity. Violence exists in the world so why not show it?
Franco Prosperi

FILM CRITIC, Mark Kermode, once remarked that in cinema there were still two unacceptable issues: child abuse and "animal cruelty". Whilst the mondo film has never been charged directly with the promotion of abuses against children, accusations of abuse of animals have been plentiful. Animals feature strongly in mondo films, either drawing 'anthropological' links between the human and non-human animal worlds or as metaphors for suffering and misery in the twentieth century milieu. The agony of animals engenders a peculiar kind of tragedy and evokes the next best thing to the emotional power of witnessing/experiencing human death in film. Clearly the act of visualizing animal suffering, particularly in the UK, is problematic and has been so for some time. The 1937 Cinematograph Films (Animals) Act, which "Prohibits exhibition or supply of

a film if animals are harmed in the film-making process by: the cruel infliction of pain or terror; the cruel goading of any animals to fury" developed from the first annual BBFC report of 1914 (of which 'cruelty to animals' was one of twenty two grounds for cuts or rejection). Three years later on BBFC president T P O'Connor's list of guidelines for cutting films (known as 'O'Connor's 43'), included "Cruelty to animals" as forbidden and this appears to be one of the few devices from the list still addressed with any seriousness. In 1919 more specific clauses containing animals were added to ban the appearance of cock-fighting and "images of animals gnawing men and children". How apt...

A Dog's Life?

One of the films containing animal cruelty to be first censored by the BBFC was the 1930 African adventure film, *Trader Horn*, directed by W S Van Dyke. The film contained footage of animals being killed and animal fights, and as such has been identified as one of the first ever 'mondo' films. In a review of Jonathan Burt's *Animals in Film*, K H Brown notes the importance of the book but laments the omittance of any material on the Italian mondo film in this particular discussion; certainly the links that Burt makes between film and politics, censorship and control, a key aspect of his thesis, are amply presented by the mondo film (there may also be prescience of the mondo film found in the work of Luca Comerio who according to Burt made travelogues from around the world containing many animal killing scenes). The central metaphor of *Mondo Cane* (a Tuscan expression of good-natured bewilderment, commonly translated as 'it's a dog's life'), and thus the mondo genre, is that of animals, in particular the dog. Indeed the film opens with a sequence of a dog being dragged reluctantly towards a compound and proceeds with numerous animal related scenes. In one of the film's most noted 'shock cuts' a juxtaposition is made between the breasts of a young American 'bikini babe' and that of a New Guinea native suckling a piglet (whose mother has died). The contrast between the adoration heaped upon pets by Americans at the famous Pasadena Pet Cemetery with that of the inhabitants of the Hong Kong island of Formosa, where dogs are uncontroversially eaten is shown. In a New York restaurant insects are consumed *a la carte*, a scene included to depict the lengths that sophisticated urbanites will go to appear cultured and daring. As well as these skilfully executed juxtapositions there are many scenes of violence against animals in the film, from tribal feasts where wild boar are bludgeoned and roasted to Ghurkha military ceremonies where cattle are behead with one stroke of a sword for neo-colonial (in this instance British) entertainment (this scene appears in nightmarish form in both *Apocalypse Now* and the documentary of its making *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*). Another key element, which would find resonance in subsequent mondos, was the usage of a sentimental musical theme attached to images of cruelty towards animals. This technique originated in *Mondo Cane* where chicks are dyed and blow-dried before being placed inside chocolate Easter eggs, and continued in a distressing account of the destruction of Bikini atoll by nuclear contamination where sea turtles die in the baking sun as they lose all sense of orientation. Ortolani and Oliviero's now very famous theme from *Mondo Cane* plays over such scenes both with dramatic irony and deliberate emotional manipulation. Critic Raymond Durgnat has aligned the work of Jacopetti to that of Georges Franju in casting both directors as makers of "pessimistic documentaries involving cruelty to animals". Franju's use of a sentimental French Ballad (Charles Trenet's La Mer) in his precise abattoir drama, *Le Sang des Bêtes,* is echoed in the tactics of *Mondo Cane* and beyond. Burt's notion of a "slaughterhouse aesthetic" where "material documenting the torture and murder of animals seems to provide a stop-gap

for the hungry sadistic eye" is here exploited most effectively.

The subsequent development of the mondo film saw the sub-genre develop a number of specific filmic modes in relation to the depiction of animals; codes which, moreover, may occur all at once in any film. The modes are thus key to mondo because the way in which these codes exploit animals continues to be problematic for critics and historians alike.

Ritual

Mondo films commonly employ representations of ritual activity in the development of shock cinema effects (see also chapter seven). *Mondo Freudo* contains scenes of a New York (Puerto Rican) black mass where "the blood of a chicken and a hog's head represents death". Snakes and chickens are sacrificed in another R L Frost effort *Mondo Bizarro*. Mid-period mondo films such as Scattini's *Angeli Bianchi, Angeli Neri* (*Witchcraft '70*) depicts animal kill 'voodoo' rituals in Miami through a "secret, hidden" camera. This was later reprised in Harvey Keith's *Mondo New York* when the film's protagonist wanders into a bloody cock-fight run by Puerto Ricans

Politics

The use of animal tragedy as a metaphor for human ills runs strongly throughout the mondo genre. In Jacopetti and Prosperi's later films such as *Africa Addio* and *Addio Zio Tom,* the treatment of blacks (Africans and African-Americans respectively) is likened to that of an animal. A scene in *Africa Addio* shows whites in Kenya hunting a black boy instead of a fox. In *Addio Zio Tom,* a black

This page **Slaughtering a cow; *Mondo Cane.***

slave boy appears in a playful garden scene tethered around the neck like a dog by his young white mistress.

Danger

Mondo films, like the adventure films that preceded them and the wildlife programmes that have replaced them, were not averse to representing animals as dangerous, deadly creatures. In *Brutes and Savages,* an African tribesman is attacked and eaten by a crocodile in a patently fabricated sequence. The later period mondo, *Faces of Death,* includes a fake sequence of an American ranger being eaten by a crocodile. In one of the most controversial mondo films, *Ultime Grida dalla Savana,* a scene is shown of a man being eaten by a lion in an Angolan national park. The incident, supposedly based on a real occurrence is presented as amateur super-8 footage and although it has been dismissed as fake by Kerekes and Slater it remains a powerful filmic experience and was required viewing for a generation of young Italian thrill seekers. The most common re-titling of the film as *Savage Man Savage Beast* demonstrates how the film was perceived to violently collapse the human and non-human animal worlds.

Violence

Some of the first scenes shot for *Africa Addio,* were records of the effect of post-colonialism on the African wildlife — "the animal harvests". Scenes of tribal hunting, though brutal to western audiences are contrasted, as usual, with the barbarity of white 'tourist' hunting (in this case an elephant hunting service described as the "fifteen minute safari"). The killing of antelope, hippopotamus and elephant is choreographed to the romantic musical score by Riz Ortolani creating a 'symphony of violence'. Ortolani tellingly based his synchronisation on observing the anthropomorphic work of the Walt Disney studio productions.

Horror

Mondo films became increasingly violent in the 1970s and 1980s and frequently incorporated extreme footage of real animal cruelty and violence as a cynical thrill-seeking device. Key examples of this are the above mentioned *Brutes and Savages* where goats are sacrificed on the Sudan/Ugandan border, a turtle is sacrificed as part of a Bolivian wedding ceremony ("to our eyes an atrocity" intones the narrator) and a Bolivian Llama is ritually killed (its still-beating heart is ripped out to an incongruous disco beat) together with

some 'animal on animal violence' as alligators attack and kill snakes and jaguars. The notorious *Faces of Death* franchise contained amongst other animal horrors pit-bull dogfights in Mexico, piranhas in the Amazon, a tribe of monkey — killing savages, (kosher) slaughterhouse scenes, seal clubbing and a ridiculous segment where, after being beaten to death at the table, a monkey's brains are eaten as a delicacy (these scenes are reprised from *Sadismo* which also features a bear being "skinned alive"). According to Kerekes and Slater these films are clearly employing "animal slaughter as a supplementary shock factor" an approach we shall see reached is nadir in the post-mondo world.

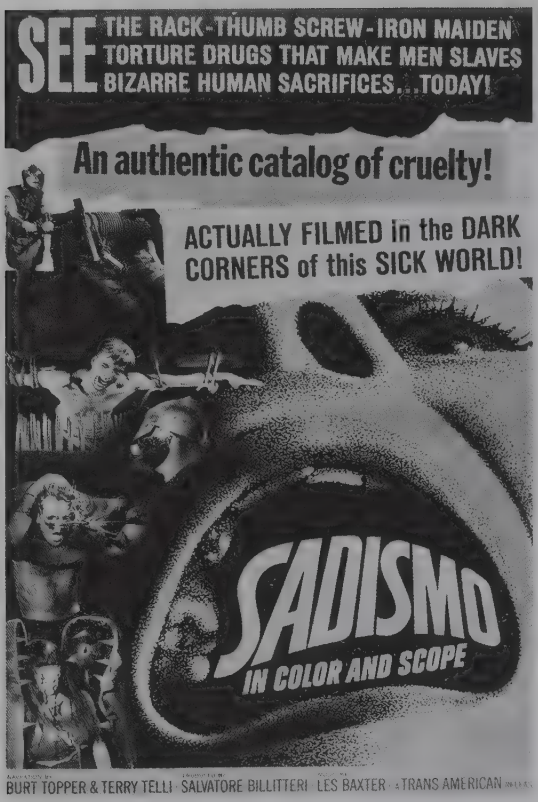
Comic

It has been already noted that mondo films are commonly structured around violent contrasts and one of these is the juxtaposition of 'dark' and 'light' cinematic moments. Thus humour plays a role in the delivery of shock cinema to audiences. As a protest against the censorship *Mondo Cane* received in Britain (it was refused a certificate by the BBFC) Jacopetti opened the follow up, *Mondo Cane No.2* with a parody of the dog pound shot that begins his first feature film. This time it is revealed that the dogs have had their vocal chord cut. The narration duly invites the British censors to cut this sequence out in the same way that the surgeons have cut out the dogs' barks. In Climati and Morra's *Savana Violenta,* the use of monkeys in tribal hunting is presented as comical: the monkeys jump on the backs of the hunted boar to slow them down and the sequence is speeded up to make it even more 'comical'. In *Africa Addio,* the score is written and synchronized to mimic the perceived characteristics of the animal being shown (bumbling, slow hippos; stilted birds etc.). This aspect of the mondo film was acknowledged in the spoof-mondo, *Mr Mike's Mondo Video*, in a sequence where cats are thrown into a swimming pool in order to learn how to swim.

Animal Holocaust *the post-mondo film*

Jonathan Burt identifies the way in which meanings are "collapsed" in the representation of animals in film. In mondo this manifests itself as meaning created from the fusing of animal and human characteristics, from a critique of the way in which humans treat other animals and from animal violence used as a shock-horror tactic. The unusual way in which animal films develop the idea of the pornographic "eco-porn" is most powerfully developed in the post-mondo films such

Previous page **Shooting a rhino in *Ultime Grida dalla Savana.*** This page **Crocodile eats man; *Faces of Death.***


SEE THE RACK-THUMB SCREW-IRON MAIDEN TORTURE DRUGS THAT MAKE MEN SLAVES BIZARRE HUMAN SACRIFICES...TODAY!
An authentic catalog of cruelty!
ACTUALLY FILMED in the DARK CORNERS of this SICK WORLD!
SADISMO
IN COLOR AND SCOPE
BURT TOPPER & TERRY TELLI SALVATORE BILLITTERI LES BAXTER TRANS AMERICAN

as the notorious mondo critique and 'video-nasty', *Cannibal Holocaust*. In this film real animal killing along a journey into exploitation and depravity merges with simulated human killing to create the ultimate shock effect — a cinema of pain and of disgust. If, as Burt argues, it is the particular combination of the natural and the visual which is troubling in terms of violence on screen, then most extreme mondo films and the post-mondo film articulate this very well. In the post-mondo the ritualised violence of the mondo film is heightened, recalling the extreme performance of artists such as the Vienna 'Action' artists where naked flesh, dead animals, blood and gore were merged into a Freudian 'theatre of cruelty'. The attraction of such 'cannibal films' where animals are openly killed as part of the mis-en-scene (other key examples include Umberto Lenzi's *Cannibal Ferox*, Antonio Margheriti's *Cannibal Apocalypse*, Sergio Martino's *Mountain of the Cannibal God*) was the combination of sex and violence pursued to vicious extremes. The frequent bouts of sex in these films is presented as 'animalistic' continuing the trend since Muybridge of coalescing the eroticised, objectified body of women with that of the 'animal'. The boundaries of representation and reality are transgressed in such films and any 'critical' message (in *Cannibal Holocaust* that being the rape of the natural world by the unnatural; the exploitation of 'primitive' cultures for western entertainment) is confused with the violent 'zoophilic' acts themselves as voyeuristic outrage. Further exploration of human/animal trauma as ritualised entertainment occur in *Des Morts* author Thierry Zéno's *Vase de Noces* (aka *Wedding Trough/The Pig-fucking Movie*), which exists within the realms of avant-garde rather than exploitation. Franco Prosperi contributed *Wild Beasts* as an ecological horror film, featuring abuse of real animals set to a 1980s funk beat, to this particular aspect of mondo.

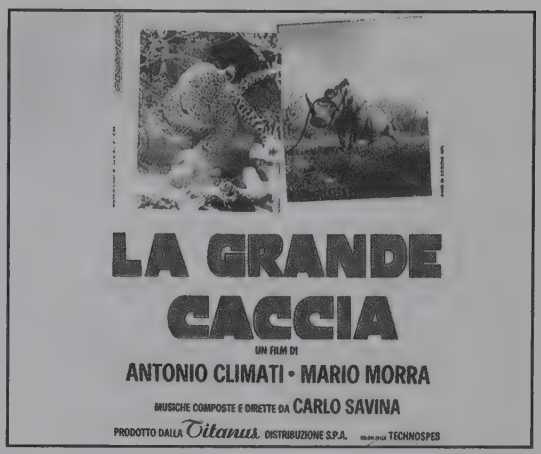
John Pym, writing in the *Monthly Film Bulletin,* once noted that the "Italian documentary tradition indulges in a gloating delight in the slaughter of small creatures" an indication that the real motivation behind such cinematic scenes is purely sadistic. Thus, the post-mondo film cleverly (some would say cynically) combines elements of the mondo aesthetic: the documentary 'shock cut'; a fascination with the anthropological with elements of the visceral horror movie to create a consistently troubling cinematic sub-genre and one which is still problematic for censors today.

The mondo and post-mondo film utilises the cinematographic arts to present shocking and disturbing images as violent entertainment. In doing this animal usage and abusage are key factors in challenging the acceptability of what can be shown in film. The mondo aesthetic is alive in the cinema of Godfrey Reggio and the cable and satellite network television shows devoted to the grotesque, violent and voyeuristic. Ron Fricke's *Baraka*

— a new-age mondo film — even contains a sequence depicting the industrialization of animal manufacture as thousands of chicks have their beaks burnt off in a factory that bears a direct relation to *Mondo Cane*. It's wordless, challenging narrative on the distress and violence met out to the animal world thus echoes the 'dog's life' of earlier mondo, a life that seems to have little value outside of 'spectacular' mass media thrills and spills.

Ultime Grida dalla Savana

[Savage Man, Savage Beast]
Dir: Antonio Climati & Mario Morra
Italy 1974


LA GRANDE
CACCIA
UN FILM DI
ANTONIO CLIMATI • MARIO MORRA
MUSICHE COMPOSTE E DIRETTE DA CARLO SAVINA
PRODOTTO DALLA Titanus DISTRIBUZIONE S.P.A. TECHNOSPES

□ "And the animal kills another animal for food. And the animal kills man for food. And man kills the animal for food. And man kills man."

So begins this remarkable, pseudo-philosophical mondo examination of hunting fixated on the cyclical, the (inter)relationship between the hunter and the hunted. *Ultime Grida dalla Savana* was a hugely influential documentary film although few people appreciate this now, its reputation as a "thinly disguised sensational exploiter" going before it. The notoriety of the film in the UK was heightened when the RSPCA raised concerns over the animal violence in the film, as they did later with Climati's *Natura Contro,* where a "sight of real animal cruelty (a monkey hit with a blowdart)" had to be cut out. The macho condemnation of attempts at wildlife preservation described, at one point, as "a pathetic and desperate undertaking" ensured the film a guarded reception in any place promoting itself to be a nation of 'animal lovers'. In contrast the film has always been popular in Asia (being the second most popular film in Hong Kong in 1976, after *Jaws*) and left an indelible impression on a whole generation of Italian youths as some sort of cinematic rite of passage. As well as providing a partial critique of the process of presenting wildlife on the cinema screen (see below) the film provided a vital link between the 'classic' shockumentaries of the early-mid 1960s and the much crueller mondos of the mid 1970s and beyond. The key aspect of this, naturally, was the presence of Jacopetti and Prosperi's principal cinematographer Antonio Climati, who orchestrated the photography in the film (*Addio Zio Tom* organisational manager Giampaolo Lomi also assisted with the production). Climati's co-director was Mario Morra, a legendary, proficient editor of Italian genre films from the 1960s, a roll-call of which acts as an ideal litany of this 'golden age' (Morra edited Pontecorvo's *La Battaglia di Algeri* (*The Battle of Algiers*) and *Quiemada* (*Burn!*), mondo narrator Enrico Maria Salerno's *Anonimo Veneziano* (*The Anoymous Venetian*), Brusati's *Pane e Cioccolata* (*Bread and Chocolate*), Cavara's *La Tarantula del Ventro Nero* (*The Black Belly of the Tarantula*), Cervi's *Il Delitto del Diavolo* (*Queens of Evil*), as well as mondo classics such as Vicario and Marghereti's *Il Pelo nel Mondo* (see chapter four). The towering presence of Alberto Moravia, one of Italy's most famous writers, lent authority and respect to the film; his commentary alternates philosophy, sociology, ethics and poetry throughout. Moravia was no stranger to adapting or having his work adapted for cinema and his commentary for *Ultime Gr-*

ida dalla Savana provided the appropriate mondo blend of poetic-subjective observation, emotion, caution and derision.

And yet, *Ultime Grida dalla Savana,* has many flaws. As Climati's first self-directed film, after working with Jacopetti and Prosperi, his tendency on occasion to hark back to these formative films was obvious. Long before the arrival of the 'compilation film' Climati and Morra were supplementing their original footage shot for *Ultime Grida dalla Savana* with material from *Africa Addio*: the Acholi tribe's hunting exhibitions are noticeable, sometimes repeated, albeit with 'authentic' sounds applied rather than to Ortolani's complex synchronized orchestration of death created for the original film. Even the original score by Carlo Savina mimics some of the aspects of the *Africa Addio* soundtrack, in particular the use of 'Wild West' style arrangements to signify the supposed freedom of men moving through dramatic landscapes on horseback, jaunty arrangements for comic effect, and the use at the beginning and the end of the film of a highly sentimental ballad as a melancholic device. Climati revisits his brilliant mercenary sequence from *Africa Addio* too when the faces of the Amazonian mercenaries "the chronically unemployed" are framed in similar close-range outlaw fashion.

As with all great mondo films the overall presentation of the film material, in this case confined to the various manifestations of 'the hunt' in global culture, is kaleidoscopic, ripping from one scenario to the next with scant regard for narrative continuity. There are some archetypal mondo style image links that recall the revolution of *Mondo Cane* into the documentary panorama some ten years earlier: scenes of a wildlife/nature rally shot at Cape Cod ("a last expression of a neo-romantic return to nature") end with a shot of toy monkey which then match-cuts to the face of an Amazonian orang-utan; this monkey's clenched fist turns into that of an Australian aborigine; the ceremonial stick held in the hand of a 'skeleton man' of the Black Volta, morphs into that of a French priest blessing a stag hunt), all of which classically serve to blur the differences between the 'modern' and the 'primitive'. Recognisable too is the trick of inserting fabricated simulations of scenarios into the trajectory of the film. In the above mentioned wildlife rally we see placards that bear the traces of being concocted by the film crew (they look too orderly to be real expressions of protest), and the clear presence of Hungarian-born Italian porn star-turned politician, Ilona Staller ('La Cicciolina'), as one of the naked participants codifies the sequence as fake (she appears again, topless, at a record of an Isle of Wight rock festival). A sequence of 'civilized' hunting moves to England (bizarrely signified musically by excerpts from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*) where the ritual is clearly factual but the representation of a sabotage by the 'Wild Fox Association' ludicrously staged (before distracting the hounds with an Afghan bitch they somehow spike the port of the hunters with laxative so that they are forced to halt for regular shit stops, and the WFA's car number plate is foreign). Later we are invited to witness an experiment where the crew try to capture the fastest animal on earth, the Cheetah, chasing an Ostrich. The 'combi van' where the camera is mounted inside, used to film such scenes, strains to keep up with the speeding animals and eventually the driver loses control and the van crashes spilling out broken camera parts. The question: who was filming this scene? may be an obvious one, but the illusion of 'reality' crumbles nonetheless. Such fakery works better when allied to a particular argument as when the tired myth of firearms as an aggressive virility booster, evident in an American pin-up-festooned shooting gallery, is mocked: "come on and buy a rifle man...and you'll become a man" a sexy female voice intones over the shots. The sound design, as always created in post-production, comprises a string of heightened audio effects applied to the various processes of carnage on display (the aboriginal kill of

kangaroos with spears and flying foxes with boomerangs being particularly resonant with affecting whips and whooshes and the many shooting expeditions echoing with the cruel smash of bullet ricochets).

There are a number of ways in which *Ultime Grida dalla Savana* became such an influential mondo film. Firstly, the fabricated yet convincingly grim 'amateur footage' sequences that occur twice in the film: the Pit Dernitz 'man being attacked and eaten by a lion in a safari park' 8mm footage and the 16mm shots of mercenaries employed to hunt, castrate, scalp and decapitate Amazonian Indios, were the blueprint for the found footage of later shockers such as Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*. The clever way in which Climati and Morra employ choppy camera movement, jump-cuts, blurred focus and square 'amateur' ratios has been copied ever since as the way to depict 'real' footage within the confines of an existing feature film. Secondly, some of the images from the film became etched in to the consciousness of exploitation film consumers: the unforgettable sequence on the "ceremony of life" of the 'skeleton men' of the Black Volta, a pogo ritual dance, shot in slow motion and from below so that their penises flap hypnotically up and down in front of the camera lens has been reused several times in compilation films. Finally, the 'real gore' of many parts of the film (the various slow motion animal confrontations and a fight between a Peruvian Puma, a farmer and his dogs, where one of dogs is disembowelled and has to be sewn up on the spot as the Puma is knifed through the heart being particularly blood splattered — these were the scenes that the RSPCA had cut) found its way into the later violent and gory mondo films such as *Faces of Death* before being formally incorporated into a huge variety of Italian horror, zombie and cannibal films.

This page **The *Ultime Grida dalla Savana* crew.**

The use and abuse of animals as a device for shock and horror may have been augmented in earlier mondo films but in *Ultime Grida dalla Savana,* it become an art form. Despite this many of the sequences are beautifully filmed and the cinematography undeniably superb: the aboriginal boomerang hunt, the electrode implanted cormorants skimming the Pampas coastline, display a virtuoso talent for slow-motion framing and movement; the atmosphere and lighting of the opening Patagonian stag hunt are stunning, and all of this elevates the film above many of the tired imitators mondo encouraged and inspired. One can see why Jenny Craven, in *Films and Filming,* was moved to describe the film as a "beautifully executed documentary of death".

But one of the best moments of the film comes when the narrative halts for a consideration on the very act of shooting these kinds of images for entertainment consumption. Over more slow-motion shots, this time of a bear capturing and eating a salmon Moravia comments:

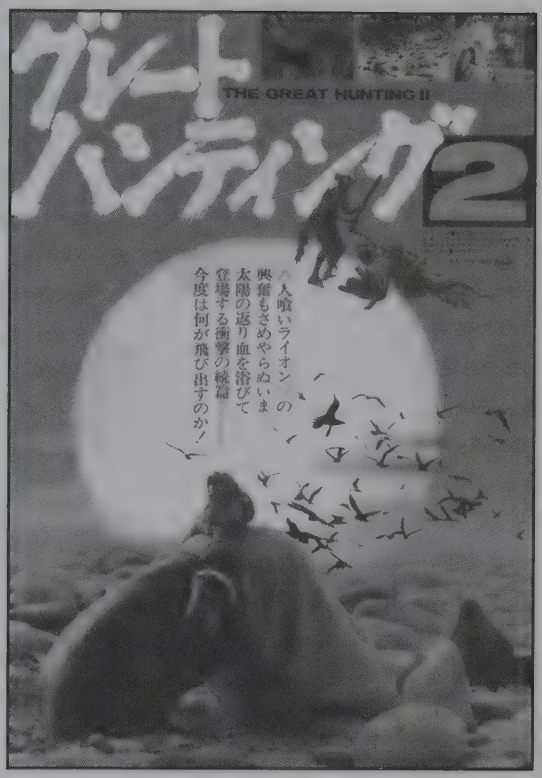
"Disregarding the cruelty of the scene we smile because certain films have conditioned us to looking at nature in a particular way and these scenes are typical of the animal documentary shot according to the manual. The rules could be summarised as follows: accentuate the romantic aspects of nature; humanise animals making them harmless and lovable; set them in a consumer society paradise, banishing bloodshed of course". A child's voice interjects: "but what about the poor fish?". The commentary resumes. "The child has spoken up and unmasked hypocrisy like her famous counterpart in the Hans Christian Anderson story. Fish also have a right to live but nothing is written in the manual about fish. This is another effect of conditioning by film: the racial discrimination among animal species. Certain animals, fish for example can be tortured and killed; others can't".

We, the audience for *Ultime Grida dalla Savana* smile too, because in this moment of poetically expressed, supremely unwitting, post-modern irony, the fraudulent majesty of the mondo film is magnificently exposed.

Savana Violenta

[This Violent World]
Dir: Antonio Climati & Mario Morra
Italy, 1976

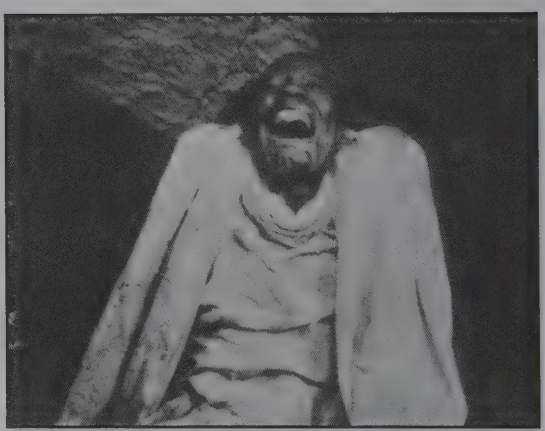
□ Fans of mondo films coming at this Climati/Morra effort from one of the many alternative titles, *Mondo Violence* or *This Violent World,* will be disappointed to discover that *Savana Violenta* is largely one of the most beautiful and evocative shockumentary film works. The film is awash with Climati's trademark golden sunsets and sunrises, peoples and animals of the world framed against orange romantic glows and slow motion shots of both tearing each other into bloody pieces. In this film Climati refines the art of framing cinematographic shock reaching visual heights that sometimes improves on those of *Ultime Grida dalla Savana,* and always surpasses those in the final part of the trilogy, *Dolce e Selvaggio*. It is no surprise that he went on to direct commercials. One of the frames of the film, a shot of an Indian fakir with his head completely buried in the hot sand, has become something of an icon of the mondo genre. The opening scenes document dawn at the site of the "primordial" beginning of time (the Lundi savannah of West Africa) in which nature — human and non-human — exist in state where "fate decides who is to live and who is to die". Zebra are attacked by lions while cheetahs kill monkeys — all in gorgeous, classically framed slow motion. A witchdoctor appears framed against the luscious dawn sky waving his magic stick (he is dressed in a long coat to signify his high status). The film returns to this scenario, albeit with a twist, at the end of the film, emphasising once again Climati and Morra's penchant for circular metaphors and eco-ideologies critiquing a natural world usurped by globalisation and capitalism. The film continues in a strange manner as the next scene depicts the children employed to record the decline of terns by the Great Barrier Reef. The beautiful landscape shots continue as one of the light motifs from the film, Let's Sing a Song (composed by the prolific brothers Guido and Maurizio De Angelis), rings out; a breezy children's' choir number that recalls the twisted utopianism of Coca Cola's I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing commercial. This being a mondo film though, such hippy optimism is soon brutally crushed by the ensuing images. The text which roles over these pictures reads: "The following episodes illustrating the cruel reality of the modern world are presented in the style of cinema vérité as a means of communicating more vividly the essential truth on which they are based". This serves as a precursor to the fracturing of both the saccharine portraits of lived reality and of film documentary rules. As was proved long ago, any notion of



Previous page & this page ***Savana Violenta — This Violent World* aka *The Great Hunting 2.***

documentary cinema vérité was destroyed by mondo aesthetics of which Climati was a lead proponent. Then the shocks come quickly, if at first gently. A sequence is shown on the cult practices of Indian fakirs, who test states of insensibility by piercing their faces and necks and contorting their bodies into grotesquely ornate shapes and forms. Two startling images resonate: the first is the above-mentioned shot of a fakir with his head buried like an ostrich; the other a man carefully slicing off part of his tongue. Both of these images, like the rest of this sequence are contrived, yet Climati's skill in portraying rituals, the way he pulls focus from one bizarre tableaux to another, recalling the best parts of *Zio Tom*, are visually jolting and induce a mild stomach churning effect. His intrusive, probing camera, goading the subjects to stare at him, also plays a part.

Climati and Morra have never shirked from reusing their own footage and the next sequence, of a perilous Colombian cable car appeared later in *Dolce e Selvaggio*. The "cinema vérité" promised a few frames back melts away here as the musical accompaniment, a brass and drum march, meant to match the images, just makes it all the more fake; exciting cinema but a very poor



simulation of 'truth'.

In addition to the excellent visual style, the film has clearly been a strong influence on subsequent post-mondo cinema. An early section recording the search in New York sewers for discarded or escaped dangerous reptiles, the nightmare of killer animals roaming the streets under our feet, must have influenced the concept behind fellow traveller Franco Prosperi's 1983 eco-horror *Belve Feroci* (*Wild Beasts*). In addition an "authorised footage" account of forbidden child slavery in the Amazon, with its grainy, yellowing film stock, helped shape the vérité aesthetics of Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal*

Holocaust, which perfected the art of simulated 'found film' (the opening airplane shots of the Amazon forest also prefigure the opening shots of the infamous cult shocker). The tribeswomen are sexually fascinated with the white slavers and this interaction also made it into Deodato's film. The film then launches into surreal mode as a group of penguins appear to be singing along to the soundtrack (the stunning Beatle/Dixie number, Anthem) — another violation of cinema 'actuality'. The De Angelis brothers even mimic the tactic begun in *Africa Addio* for matching animals with their musical instrument likeness. The actuality slips even further away in a patently false scene on primal scream therapy in a London clinic where couples excise their sexual frustrations through yelling abuse at each other. Some are encaged in glass booths where they can extend this 'therapy' into a physical 'cure' ("rape therapy" the narrator describes it). The scenes are fake and loosely pornographic but the presence of a recognisable English character actor as one of the clinicians weakens the credibility further.

The theme of violence against animals, always an essential and distressing element of Climati and Morra's *oeuvre*, then takes hold. After grim footage of the remains of a girl attacked by a white shark (her face chillingly left intact), a 'revenge' takes place when the fish are hunted for use in fertility drugs. Their captured forms are sliced open and mutilated while they are still conscious. A gore shot of one's still pumping heart, visible through the huge gash in its stomach, induces definite queasiness. This violence is cut together with images of human trauma to induce the sense of our own mortality and organic state: shots of suicide corpses washed up by the River Ganges, are picked at by vultures. In the New Hebrides dead fisherman are left out to rot in the heat. The putrefactions that run from the corpse must be sipped by his relatives. Meanwhile in Argentina deer are caught in nets and Nandoo birds are entwined with balls on a rope in a perfectly executed 'ballet of death'. In Papua two tribes fight over a boar hunt. When an angry tribesman smashes Climati's filter holder (the sequence was filmed "against police advice") the arrest of the

Previous page **Scenes from *Savana Violenta*.**
This page **Antonio Climati (with camera) on the set of *Ultime Grida Dalla Savana*.**

crew in Zanzibar in *Africa Addio* is recalled. When the camera tips over onto its side and continues to film another reference to *Cannibal Holocaust* rears up. The ghost of *Mondo Cane* appears in an account of giant turtles, weakened by pollution, are unable to propel their eggs. Naturalist "midwives" move in to help them by extracting the eggs by hand.

There are comic moments in the film, to relieve the slaughter. In a Mozambique national park baboons are used to help 'hunt' the wild boar. The monkeys jump onto the backs of the boar as if they were horses in a Wild West rodeo in order to slow them down and make then easier to catch (the music, predictably follows the Western theme). Two teams of Mongoose play 'football' with bittern eggs, a soccer commentary, rendered in excitable Portuguese ("Goaaaallll!!!") emphasises the comedy. Eroticism is also used for 'relief' and in *Savana Violenta,* this takes the form of the unique creation of 'Amazon porn'. We have already peeped in on an Amazonian couple making love in the jungle and now the scene switches to a ceremony by the River Paya where the scales of a large fish are applied to erogenous parts of the body as prelude to the

"love season of the firefly". The simulation of sex/fertility rites is shot through soft porn lenses but at least the director's confess their duplicitous intentions: "we waited six days to film the capture of this fish but without this fish the young people of the tribe would not have their festival and we should not be able to film it!". A sequence in the Tropian Islands where women fling themselves from a mango tree to induce miscarriage opens with the kind of close-up, from below, bum shot that Russ Meyer would have approved of. The latter parts of this sequence, where we see the bloody foetus ripped from the woman and

buried ritualistically were restaged, equally photogenically, for *Cannibal Holocaust*. The diversion to an English porno film shoot (in Richmond, Surrey for "Hutchinson Studios") with its camp style and appearance by former punk rock icon Jordan is, like the very notion of English erotica, farcical. More hunting absurdity occurs with the account of Peter

Thompson's school for 'White Aborigines' in Darwin, Australia where "pale asses" learn to capture crocodiles, drink sap from a tree and spear iguana (again, the 'warrior' music makes the whole thing seem preposterous).

The penultimate scenes are devoted to death in the human sphere. The horrific aftermath of the Guatemalan earthquake of 1976, where 22,000 were killed, is shown. The images of rotting and smashed, fly infested corpses are distressingly real — at one point the camera 'turns away' in mock disgust. The camera does not turn away however from the brutal execution of a young looter whose dog sits forlornly by his machine gun riddled body after the killing. The Rio Carnival, where people "sing and dance, copulate and kill" also ends with a bloody shooting in a side street all driven, perversely, by the pulsating, Latin stand-out cue from the soundtrack. The film ends back at the start, the Lundi savannah, but as promised with a twist. On this morning the hunted fight back, the" underdog finds the strength to rebel".

Climati and Morra's second film of animal violence is arguably the most beautiful to look at. No matter how hideous the acts we bear witness to, these contributions to the definition of mondo are aesthetically strong and memorable. The shimmering golden orb that ends this, and Climati and Morra's other 'savage' films, offers hope and defines the optimism lacking in subsequent shockumentary cinema.

Dolce e Selvaggio

[Sweet and Savage]
Dir: Antonio Climati &
Mario Morra
Italy, 1983

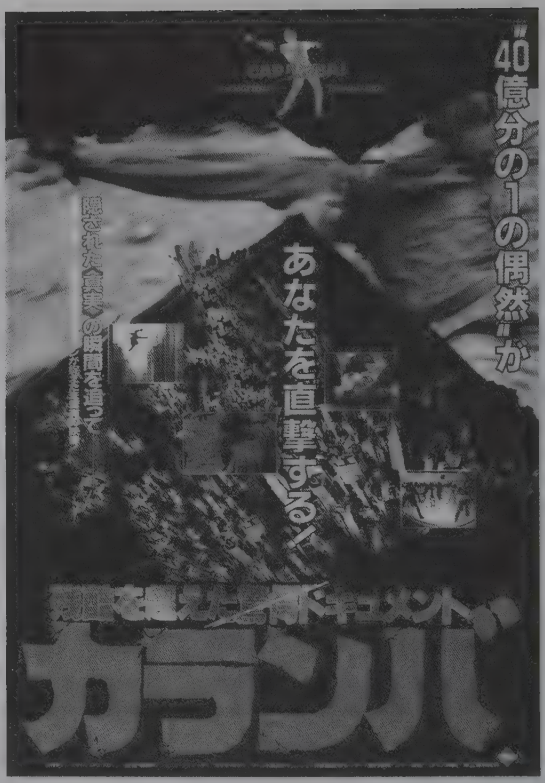
The tree of man grew from a seed of the sea. Its roots are birds and iguana, water and naked rock. Its spirit is aloft like a white bird. Its fruit is sweet and savage
Kanadané (Inca poet)

□ This film represents the third and final segment of Climati and Morra's great mondo trilogy and is a fascinating, yet late contribu-

Previous page & this page **Indian fakirs and a primitive abortion rite in *Savana Violenta*.**

tion the mondo cannon. Although undoubtedly more artificial and unconvincing than earlier mondo efforts, even with Climati and Morra's own contributions, the film has a powerful disquieting quality to it. Moreover, the polarised theme of the movie and its title — the "pendulum swing" between the sweet and the savage — although often laboured as a linking device, epitomises the essential raw elements of mondo aesthetics. There are several odd departures in the film that bear closer scrutiny. Firstly, the device of having 'real' characters in the film speaking directly to the camera (thus to the audience) is a mondo first. The character of Mike Gunn, a blonde bearded Rhodesian gamekeeper, is supposed to embody the sweet and savage concept. We first see him apparently hunting zebra and hippos before it is revealed that he is in fact aiming his rifle at Bulgarian Skoda land mines planted during civil conflicts in the region. We are informed by narrator Robert Sommer that Gunn "fought in a savage war...and you can still see it in his eyes" (this is inter-cut with an ugly scenario from said conflict) and the figure of Gunn appears throughout the film as a motif (he emerges playing with hippos and cheetahs), which actually means very little. Occasionally he offers vague philosophical comments on man's relationship with nature with animals and, inter-textually, reacts to a joke by the narrator. Gunn is coded "an enigma, sweet and savage, a man". Secondly, voice over is used as a testimony or storytelling device and is 'acted' in place of the standard narration by an expert. The film therefore has a dreamy quality to it, which captivates the viewer for a while.

But there is a cheap and even shoddy quality to many aspects of the film and the horrific 1980s electro sax funk provided by Daniele Patucchi as a musical backing prefigures hideous later mondos, such as Crisanti's *Mondo Cane 2000* (see chapter one) and even Prosperi's own *Belve Feroci*, which the same composer scored for. The hack job is compounded by the fact that Climati and



Morra have cannibalised their own films by inserting various scenes recognisable from *Ultime Grida dalla Savana*: the footage of English foxhunting ("sweet is the air of the English countryside...savage are the games people play there") and both the Patagonian conservation footage and the slow motion African tribe 'pogo' are recognisable). The commentary was written by Climati's former mondo comrade Franco Prosperi, which explains the film's obsession with the interface between man and the natural world while the literary pretensions of the text, quoting authors and various poets, is an attempt at raising the intellectual plane of the film. Prosperi also tries to add circularity and cohesion to the disparate images, a task in his own films he has proved to be adept at, here from the site of man's beginning to the modern man (Mike Gunn) and back again. Prosperi, being a naturalist at heart fires critiques of the "orgy" of modern consumerism demonstrating that he is also a moralist.

Blixen's lament to the passing of the ancient, traditional African way of life.

The common mondo taste for the naked female form, perhaps inevitably used here to flesh out the 'sweet' metaphors, include sequences on soft porn photographer Jeff Dumas (said to have shot over 1000 models "each a fragment of an image of the women of his dreams") which is definitely mocking in tone and some footage of a 'Jane Fonda' workout in an American gym (backed by Josette Martial's absurd Burotrash disco number Ring Ding Dong), which predictably

Prosper's long held disgust at the corrosion of naturalism in the modern world emerges with a condemnation of the factory farming of previously 'free' animals. The slow-motion killing of springbok, a Climati Morra specialism is presented with the customary aerial photography managing to be stunning and sickening at the same time. The animals "run with the wind and die in the sun" the commentary accuses before quoting Karen

offers stacks of bum and crotch shots. The opening salvo on Ostrich meat is obstructed from brutal shots of the birds having their necks broken (amplified sound effect snaps, naturally) juxtaposed with photo-shoot im-

Hit page: A corpse hacked to pieces in a Tibetan funeral rite: Dolce e Selvaggio.

ages of naked woman using the feathers as seductive apparel. There are also the humorous moments of the classic mondo format, this time the grisly sight of a Bolivian slaughterhouse, where the cow's blood is drunk straight from a severed artery 'on tap', and numerous scenes of dolphin training, which for reasons I have yet to discover, Italian documentary filmmakers find fascinating. This being the mid eighties and the high-point of horrific film horror gore and slasher aesthetics there are possibly fabricated, yet nonetheless stomach churning, events represented. One such moment includes a Tibetan funeral rite where the corpses of the dead are lifted to the mountain tops before being hacked to pieces limb by limb and fed to the waiting vultures. The severed head looks very much like a false one. It is the way in which a film like *Dolce e Selvaggio* offers, on the one hand poetic, beautifully composed images representing the awe of nature and lyrical narration (as visioned in the title sequence — waves crashing against Galapagos shores, flamingos, seals — a mondo picture postcard favourite, and the golden sunsets framing animals and people in delicious light) together with gore, violence and carnage (slaughter of seals and dolphins on the Japanese island of Iki where the water is turned red) that illustrates, even in a later mondo, the dimensions which make the films unique. But this balance is a delicate one. Climati and Prosperi stretch the metaphor too far when a scene of Haitian refuges being washed up dead on a Florida beach is turned into a parodic scene as a student lifesaver administers the 'kiss of life', backed by some cheesy piano music. She happens to be attractive and blonde, kisses the boy seductively and softly and giggles when the cameras leave. Strange though it may seem, there can be too much sweet as well as too much savage.

Mondo films of this era usually deliver some haunting material and *Dolce e Selvaggio* is no exception. It may not seem a significant contribution to the central concept of the film, but the eerie way in which the filmmakers have knitted their own footage of a tightrope walker Philippe Petit, perilously crossing a high-wire to raise money for a church in New York City with archive of the tragic death of circus patriarch Karl Wallenda, who in March 1978 fell to his death attempting to cross a wire between two hotels at San Juan, Puerto Rico. The two tightrope acts are brilliantly fused by the narration, an imagined voice over by Petit, reflecting on Wallenda's final act (Phillipe crossed a wire strung between the Twin Towers in 1974). The music used for the excruciating Wallenda tragedy is equally clever, a celestial glass-rim wail of pain. "Being on the tightrope is living; everything else is waiting" Wallenda once opined yet in this distressing, visceral mondo moment being on the tightrope meant death. This scene is followed by another 'real' event with the accidental death of film stuntman A J Bakunas (already the world record holder for such a jump) while performing a leap from Kincaid tower in Kentucky for the otherwise forgettable action film *Steel*. The insertion of such reality footage into the film, as part of the investigation into the motives behind man's actions, foresaw the avalanche of 'reality TV' show in the 1990s and beyond. But in this mondo film they act within particular contexts, poetically and so are infinitely more powerful and meaningful. In *Dolce e Selvaggio* the real death of humans and animals still reverberates on the subconscious mind, as it should in the best mondo films.

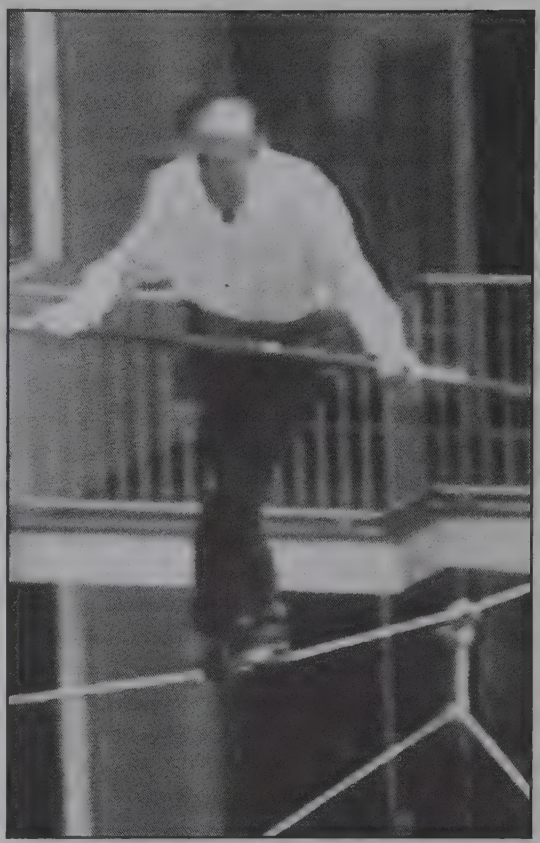
The sombre and sad end to the film is a portrait of human and animal symbiosis as a paralysed New Yorker is helped to eat, drink and listen to music by a trained monkey. The scene is supposed to be a positive message about the relationship between animal and man and yet the scene feels desperate. This is due to the way that the filmmakers employ music and voice-over to imply sadness and is a fitting end to the last of the great mondo film epics.

Faces of Death

Dir: Conan LeCilaire (John Alan Schwartz)
US, 1979

□ *Faces of Death*, and the franchise that it begat, has become one of the most famous elements of shockumentary film history, symbolic of mondo, and yet is in essence a cheap facsimile of a mondo film and a clichéd representation of the bizarre and the shocking. Even the name of the director has been hidden, not an unheard of device in the mondo cannon, but the *nom-de-plume* adopted for *Faces of Death* of Conan LeCilaire is tangibly ridiculous. The real director, John Alan Schwartz, was an editor for Leonard Nimoy's 1970s *In Search of...* TV Series where the supernatural and the mysterious were examined. He also wrote for the ludicrous 1980s *Knight Rider* TV crime series a vehicle for David Hasselhoff and his magical supercar. Once these facts are known about its creator the insincerity and fraudulence of the *Faces of Death* 'language' becomes evident (as does its inevitable serialisation — to date there have been four 'official' entries).

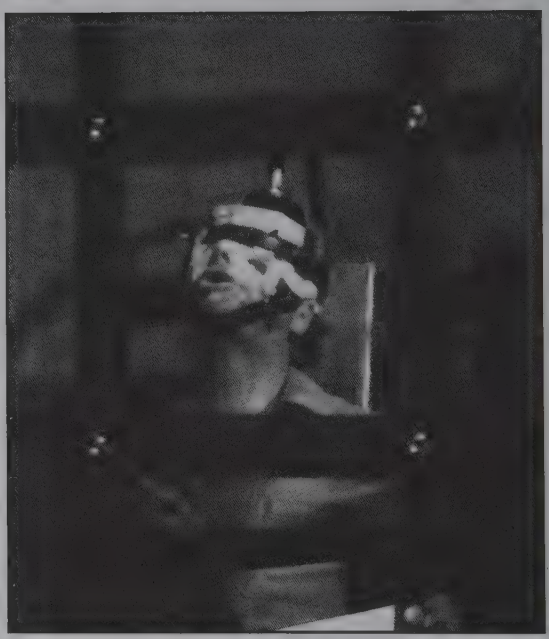
Faces of Death's identikit manifestation of shock aesthetics is evident in the selection and presentation of material, offering a familiar parade of mondo elements: 'primitive' African tribes and Amazonian Indians; violent happenings; strange rituals; animal killings (bullfights, slaughterhouses). The film is carried by a mordant mock-narration delivered by "Dr. Frances B Gröss" who also acts as a 'creative consultant' and who is included to authenticate the film's material and act as an 'expert' on the "many faces of death". Gröss is actually played by actor Michael Carr and his absurd false moustache, wig and ham acting (in the great American expository tradition) falsifies the film before it has barely begun (once Gröss's unconvincing appearance has vanished from the screen, leaving only his voice as an accompaniment, this effect is not quite so intrusive). The in-



This page **Tightrope walker Karl Wallenda about to fall to his death in March 1978; *Dolce e Selvaggio*.**

troduction to the film is probably the most 'documentary-like', a gruesome montage of open-heart surgery, corpses being sliced open, scalps being peeled back and haunting still shots of agonised dead faces which do deliver, augmented as they are by Gene Kauer's low spooky strings, ghostly electronic 'music' and amplified sound effects (sawing of bones, sloshing organs and tearing skin), sickening shocks to the viewer. This effect is tangible despite the insertion of bloody horror film titles and the massively clichéd use of a pulsating heartbeat effect, exempt from even the crassest student film production, which halts to signify the arrival of mortality.

The following section, a soliloquy on death delivered by Dr Gröss (as he removes his bloody lab coat and surgical gloves, dumping them in the nearest pedal bin) contributes the kind of presentation favoured by American 'believe it or not' TV programmes, any documentary status not encouraged further by some surreal shots of a woman lying in a coffin which is then lowered into the ground. The angle switches to POV and we see the soil fall over us before the camera goes black and the organ which has accompanied these shots careers wildly out of time and tune. This is supposed to be Gröss's "recurring dream" which "plagues him". There then follows a compilation of Gröss's "library of the many faces of death", many of which are some of the most extreme examples in the mondo cannon, others which are some of the feeblest. The contorted faces of exhumed Mexican mummies are certainly terrifying and formed an effective part of the film's promotion (especially in Japan, where the film was a huge success). These recall the hideous death faces shown in the introduction and exemplify the mondo trend for symbiosis effectively and poignantly. Later in the film more mortuary shots, accompanied by a poetic quotation and a plaintive saxophone solo, briefly suggest a (sadly unrealised) *Des Morts*-style discourse on death and dying. After some typical mondo insertions featuring snakes being eaten by Piranha fish and the



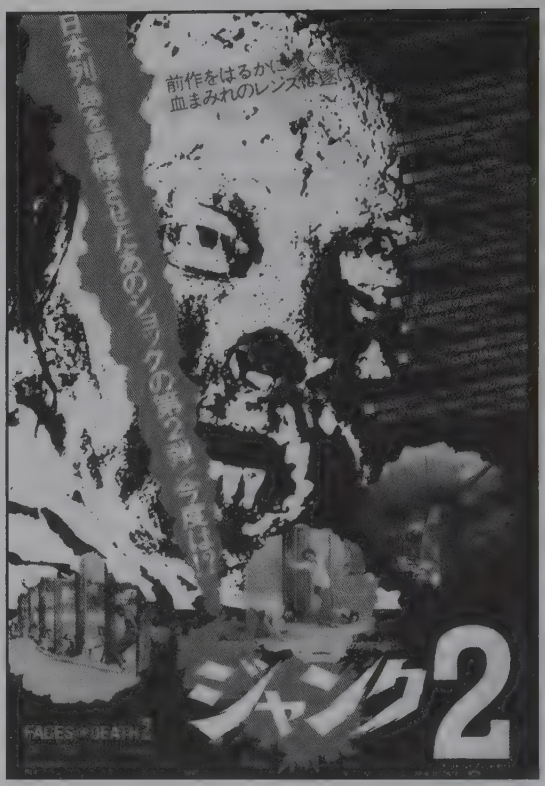
obligatory severed head rituals of the Ibero "savages" the film launches into its first catalogue of gory animal slaughter, a key aspect of the *Faces of Death* franchise. First a Maasai sacrifice is shown where a cow's jugular is pierced and the blood which pours from the wound is captured and mixed in a pot. Then a chicken is beheaded in a US farmyard to the backing tune of Old McDonald's Farm. The shots of the beheaded animal flapping frantically around the yard are surprising but

are made comic by the use of inappropriate silly backing music (this, it turns out, is an irritating feature of the film). The Kosher method of slaughtering is depicted, scenes of immense carnage, accompanied by statistics about massive American meat consumption and the way in which carnivores, through industrialization processes are removed from the process of killing. The pastoral sounds of Greensleeves introduce this scene and more jaunty classical music plays behind the scenes an awfully crude manifestation of the mondo trend for musical counterpoint. One of the most infamous iconic scenes concerning the killing of animals follows when a group of four tourists in an 'Indian' restaurant enjoy an exotic meal. A monkey as brought to the table and restrained in a special cage, only its head is visible. The male members of the group then bash its head in with special tools before the waiter carves open the skull and removes the brains. The tourists then eat the raw bloody brains with a mixture of amusement and disgust. Sadly any horror is tempered by the bare fact that the scene is obviously fabricated, the flimsy set and dreadful acting gives it away above all else. After some shots of alligator poaching ("the murderers of nature"), nature replies with a vengeful attack by a crocodile on some park rangers. This scene is shot as a live news bulletin, complete with reporter (from "Channel 9 Action News") and is another fake, discernible not only by the presenter's very tight casual brown T-shirt and white bell-bottom flares but by the unconvincing limp cries of "Oh my God!" as the reptile chews the man. Hideous scenes of seal clubbing where bloody carcasses stain the ground red are accompanied by more obtrusive backing, this time film noir/chase music. "I decided never to wear the skin of an animal on my back again", claims Grösss in a passable imitation of shockumentary moralising.

The film then switches to human killings by type: the deranged family man (Michael Lawrence is shot dead by Police after butchering his family); the suicide (Mary Ellen Wright jumps from a window) and the professional assassin (Francois Girodin shoots dead a political speaker in La Salle). A weak condemnation of American state killings (executions — later to spawn

Previous page **State execution: gas chamber and electric chair; *Faces of Death.***
This page **Monkey brains on the menu, and exhumed Mexican mummies; *Faces of Death.***

a pseudo-mondo dedicated to this theme) is presented with more reconstructions of death via the gas chamber and the electric chair (once again substandard acting diminishes the credibility). It is after this point that the film should probably end but it drags on with several more disjointed 'faces of death', lacking the originality and the discipline of other (especially Italian) mondo films and confirming Schwartz as a not very good filmmaker. A climber falls down a ravine, natural disasters ensue (volcanoes and nuclear damage) and the inclusion of archive footage of Nazi atrocities and the starving in Biafra all collide and mush together in a hodgepodge of shock images saying nothing and meaning even less. The morbid conclusion to the film is a collection of discernibly 'real' footage of plane disasters and car crashes where the bloody carnage of scattered body pieces and lakes of blood are genuinely unsettling. Then the film lurches once again into absurdity with some 'documents' of parapsychology where only the uncanny electronic music is worthwhile. It may seem perverse to associate artistry with mondo but *Faces of Death*, uncaringly compiled, definitely lacks any such reflective qualities. Even the weak pastiches of previous mondos fail. A document on a murderous San Franciscan cult, shot with 'special permission' is a confused blend of Charles Manson and a scene from Scattini's *Witchcraft '70*. The "maniac" leader of the cult, shown removing the heart and organs of a sacrificial victim, is played by the director Schwartz (the young women in the group smear their breasts with blood in the film's only titillatory moment). The section on cryogenics is a *Des Morts* rip-off and the scene where a man is killed by a bear in a safari park after leaving his car to get better shots is terribly realised; at least Climati and Morra's cine-footage of a man being attacked and eaten by a lion requires that you look twice, or even three times, to verify its authenticity. Further mondo clichés are repeated: a woman giving birth and deer leaping in slow motion before the climax of



a freeze-frame red sunset. Yet, *Faces of Death*'s only achievement was to signal the final end of the classic mondo period. After this the mondo film lurched into formless perversion and degradation. *Faces of Death* is ultimately so insincere, cheaply commercial and cynically realised that the disclaimer at the end ("exiguous scenes within this motion picture have been reconstructed to document and further clarify their factual origin") is barely necessary.

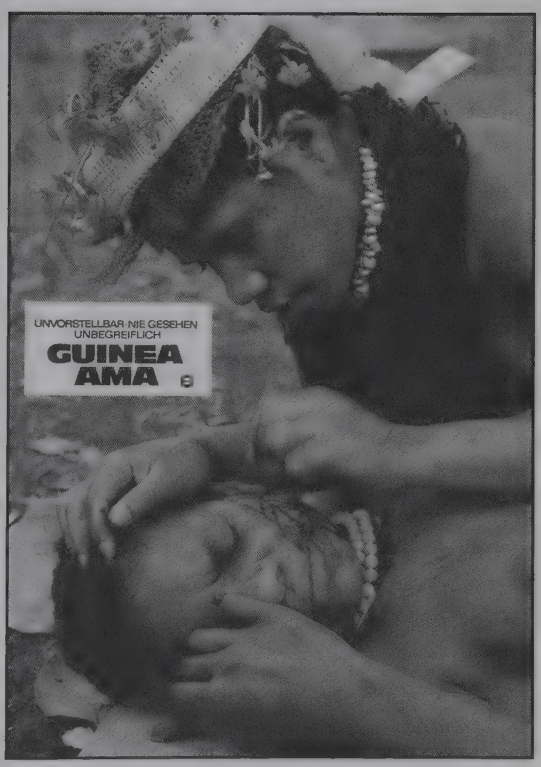
Mondo Magic & Ritual

"unspeakable cults, erotic rites"

Magic should serve, through ritual cannibalism, to confirm man's superiority in the face of nature
Alberto Moravia

Our films were a compromise between spectacular effects and the needs of the ethnographer. Sometimes we got it right, but not always
Angelo and Alfredo Castiglioni

IN HIS 1970s African travel book *Which Tribe do you Belong To?* the great Italian writer Alberto Moravia describes witnessing a *ju-ju* ceremony in Lagos. For Moravia the fascination of such ceremonies lies in the fear it engenders in Europeans tourist-visitors (and before that European colonialists). Despite its move towards neo-capitalism Africa remains, according to Moravia, paradoxically "prehistoric" both in terms of the visual (landscape) and of its devotion still to the various processes of magic. Magic in Africa remains rooted in a fear of the unknown and the irrational. Many of Moravia's considerations, his assessment, for example, that the African is more "unstable", and less "sound" than the European, now seem at best simplis-



Previous page **More of the same: Japanese poster for *Faces of Death* 2.**

tically old-fashioned and at worst offensively racist (what Mary Louise Pratt writing in *Imperial Eyes* calls "a discourse of negation, domination, devaluation and fear"). Yet what the author does capture, both beautifully and lyrically, is the European obsession with viewing, watching and 'experiencing' the 'fear' and 'terror' of such ritual magic. This obsession was previously located in literature and poetry but now crucially and most powerfully, via the film imagination (sections of Moravia's book, his travels to Tanzania, were written while on location for an Italian TV film by Pier Paolo Pasolini — probably the unfinished *Appunti per una Orestiade Africana*). Moravia, having contributing to Cavara's mondo critique *L'Occhio Selvaggio* (*The Wild Eye*), subsequently went on to become an influential figure in the construction and development of the 'ethnographic' mondo film, contributing commentary to two of the finest examples of such cinematic art Antonio Climati and Mario Morra's *Ultime Grida dalla Savana* and Alfredo and Angelo Castiglioni's *Magia Nuda*. Moravia produced his scripts for these two films at the same time as these new forms of mondo were being developed and his subjective, poetic and eroticised approach to the anthropological and the ethnographic is stamped all over films dedicated to the expression of 'mondo magic'. The rich language of Moravia ("*juju* has a very special quality of foulness" and "is a sombre disgusting substitute for science") resonates throughout the disturbing yet often problematic mondo depictions of ancient ritual and occult practices. Like Jacopetti, Moravia sought to update the picture of Africa offered previously by writers such as Kipling and later Hemmingway, into a modern, freeform prose style, the scripted surreal visions of mondo film's visual and audio aesthetics. Moravia's observation that the colours of African fashion exhibited a "barbarism" echoed in the "pictorial experiments of the European avant-garde" echoes the modernist schemata of many mondo films and their lurid design elements both in terms of the film and its promotion (see *Africa Addio*, *Mondo Magic*, *Africa Segreta* (*Africa Uncensored*). Andrew Sarris, in a review of Godard's *Le Mepris* (which Moravia scripted) noted that for the Italian writer "sexuality and sensuality are the symbolic currencies of art, history, sociology, politics and economics". The 'mal d'Africa' favoured by the European imagination both on the page and on screen, can therefore be found articulated through Moravia's' travel writing and then his mondo film scripts.

Meanwhile in his own rather dubious account of travels in Africa for his film *Brutes and Savages* American producer and self-styled 'explorer' Arthur Davis recounts a ritualised Sudanese 'love dance', his description of which beautifully captures this mondo voyeuristic fascination with the exotic: "The flickering flames reflected distorted images of the dancers across the ground, shrinking their legs and stretching their bodies in grotesque caricatures of human shapes. I almost felt as if I were possessed by the same wild spirit. I could hardly distinguish reality from insanity. It looked like the Witchdoctor was conducting a party in hell".

Mondo films reflect the obsessions of their time and the visual depiction of 'ritual' held fascination for a wide range of directors beyond the mondo cannon (Godard, Fellini, Pasolini). For Herman Weinberg this obsession has developed out of a cynical outlook on the modern world and its increasingly complex cultural manifestations. His observation that "the flagrantly explicit depictions of sex and violence so far beyond anything ever depicted before (not even sparing us the sudden frenzy of cannibalism)...is surely a reflection in the cinema of a growing pessimism about the future of mankind and the absence of ideals and myths on which to peg a more constructive horizon" articulates the spirit of art film excursions into the ritual tableaux as well as more formal shockumentary themes and codes. In his article on *Mondo Cane* Parker Tyler, a long standing exponent of 'magic and myth in the movies', describes the

"hysteria" induced from the "dominant instincts" that the film probes and offers up as souvenirs to its audience. In describing *Mondo Cane*, and the rituals of the 'modern and primitive' as an "unparalleled guidebook to the sacred and the profane" Tyler articulates the correct emphasis of the mondo school: namely to ritualise bizarre customs as filmed entertainment. Let us recall too that the master of the cinema of the unconscious, in an essay entitled *Cinema, Instrument of Poetry*, Luis Buñuel, drew our attention to the 'ritual' of the cinematic experience and the special role cinema plays, above all other arts, in placing the spectator in a "state of ecstasy".

These themes of ritual, magic and witchcraft, present as far back in films such as *Ingagi*, *Island of Lost Souls*, *King Kong*, *Tabu*, *Goona Goona*, and fuelled the imaginations of other filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s ("fascinating cannibalism" — the mixture of fascination and horror that 'ethnographic' films evoke — according to Fatimah Tobing Rony). Polish director Jerzy Kawalerowicz's film, *Mother Joan of the Angels/Devil and the Nun* for example, featured scenes of exorcisms (later restyled in Ken Russell's *The Devils*). The pre-mondo film, *L'Impero del Sole*, the third in a series of Italian exploration films (the previous were *Magica Verde* and *Continente Perduto*) was composed of ritualised activities including drug rituals, birth customs, death feasts, animal violence, imported Catholic ceremonies and contrasts these with modernized 'ugly' South America (Franco Prosperi and Stanis Nievo began their careers on such exotic missions).

No doubt of equal fascination for Italians was the creation of the Sicilian 'Abbaye de Thélème' in 1920 by English magician Aleseir Crowley, a place where 'sacred orgies', drug-fuelled ritualised acts of sexual magic where carried out. Jacopetti and Prosperi certainly found such macabre rituals of interest: the sequel to *Mondo Cane*, *Mondo Cane 2* features an astonishing Mexican 'feast of the dead' sequence where children consume

confectionary sculpted into skulls and body parts, or with meticulous detail, into a likeness of Judas and shots of Indian fakirs defying the pain of hot coals and multiple piercings. Meanwhile such 'sinister practices in bright sunshine' became a staple of mondo films with numerous sequences on Catholic exorcisms, incantations, magic spells and rituals in Southern Italy, mostly created out of desperate poverty, a reaction against the failures of the 'natural order' to bring good fortune, inserted for shock effect. The bizarre dance of the *tarantella* (tarantulas) is symptomatic of this kind of mondo magic appearing again in *Mondo Cane 2*, the crazy scenes of women under a spell shrieking and flailing in deconsecrated churches being culturally interesting and cinematically shocking. The ritualised killings of animals occurred in many performance art pieces of the 1970s (Austrian Hermann Nitsch in particular) in an attempt at capturing the primitive energy of the occult rituals in a clinical, scientific age. These attracted the attentions of mondo filmmakers too, most famously in the legendary mocking of French artist Yves Klein and his performances in *Mondo Cane*.

In 1930 French dramatist and theorist Antonin Artaud wrote an essay called *Witchcraft and the Cinema* concerned with the "unexpected" and "mysterious" side of the cinematic arts. "The cinema reveals a whole occult life with which it puts us directly into contact" he inscribes "but" he continues "we must know how to divine this occult life". The mondo film, wilfully lacking the "clear thought" of conventional narrative drives and exhibiting instead "dreams in conscious life", a "fantasy which appears ever more real", brings this philosophy right up close to us and in full colour.

A WILD, WEIRD WORLD
OF BIZARRE PRACTICES
Witchcraft '70
EXPOSED thru the eye of the HIDDEN CAMERA!
COLOR BY MOVIELAB
A P.A.C.-CARAVEL PRODUCTION • A TRANS AMERICAN RELEASE
©1970 Trans American Films

Angeli Bianchi...Angeli Neri

(Witchcraft '70)
Dir: Luigi Scattini
Italy, 1969

□ This mondo film, although never on any levels a movie masterpiece ("scrapings from the mouldering *Mondo Cane* barrel" one review described it), is an exquisite example of how the unique sensibilities of Italian shockumentary filmmaking can be pathetically wrecked by the interventions of overly-commercialised American entertainment practices. Luigi Scattini's later forays into erotic thrillers were admittedly weak. Yet Scattini is a highly competent mondo filmmaker (he also made *Sexy Magico* with Mino Loy, *Questo Sporco Mondo Meraviglioso* and *Svezia: Inferno e Paradiso*), and the subject of *Angeli Bianchi...*, that of the occult and witchcraft in the modern age, was ideal for shockumentary fans searching for a new angle on the *mondo cane*. The American exploitation producer, Robert Lee Frost, who re-edited the film for the US market, did not violate Scattini's film to the same level as his counterpart Jerry

Gross did with Jacopetti and Prosperi's *Africa Addio*, but he certainly made a mess of it. Scattini and his regular mondo team of cinematographer Claudio Racca and narrator Enrico Maria Salerno (reading the text of novelist and critic Alberto Bevilacqua) produced a luridly satisfying look at modern witchcraft, despite many of the scenes being staged or restaged events and the film appearing more 'fake' than Scattini's other mondo efforts. The tedious moral certainty of American documentary, the need to 'explain' everything using 'experts', materialised when Frost supplemented Scattini's original footage with bits of his own: lame testimony/interviews and sensationalist, naff horror motifs blighting the original aura (he also re-titled the film with the much less poetic *Witchcraft '70*). Although Scattini's original was driven by a pungently heady mixture of the occult, sex and horror this was needlessly amplified in the American version of the film becoming less of an inquiry and more of a joke. Edmund Purdom's English narration, always veering towards the hammy, achieves hilarious new heights of melodrama and every other word is emoted with Vincent Price-esque camp solemnity. The music also matches the ham of Purdom's narration constantly rising to 'scary' crescendos and drenched in horror film musical cliché: ascending low single piano or harpsichord notes, vibrato minor chords, slashing discordant strings (this soundtrack displaced Piero Umiliani's original superb rich, psychedelic score, a further corrosion of quality — see appendix i). The unintentionally comical title sequence created by Biamonto and Grisanti sets the scene perfectly, an all-expense-spared compendium of cheap horror signifiers: bulging eyes, rising smoke, flash frames, possessed, convulsing bodies shot from weird angles, and the looming countenance of the Alesteir Crowley-wannabe Anton LaVey (the "high priest of Satan") whose trademark piercing and demonic stare alarms until we see his house painted all black like a teenager's bedroom.

The archetypal dishonesty of mondo is, however, inescapable whichever version of the film you enjoy. Several times in the film the narrator informs us that due to a "lack of co-operation" from Satanist groups we are about to witness "home movie 8mm footage" "purchased" by the film's producers and "blown up to 35 millimetres". These sequences, the first depicting a Bahian (Brazilian) ritual cleansing the sins of man through the flagellation of prostitutes, the second of a "stylised folk drama" held in Bali and incorporating a trance-like dance preceding self mutilation with swords, on closer examination are fakes — albeit quite cleverly constructed ones. Scattini has taken care to insert the white dot perforations common to domestic film formats and a convincing grainy drop in quality, but the portraits of the participants in these dramas look far too professionally framed and the silence of the Java footage is eventually impinged upon by the inclusion of sad, eerie flute music, which the viewer is drawn into long before they realise the duplicity of such actions. Similarly contrived moments recording a voodoo ceremony in Louisiana make a good job of mimicking secret filming activities (one of the participants suddenly looks at up the camera, but, we are reassured, "he is a paid informant"). A sequence at the end of the film on a counter-culture satanic ritual, ending with the sexual assault of the initiates, is

said to have been filmed from such a distance, using telephoto lenses, that the sound is inaudible. Yet we hear a vague sub-Hendrix wah-wah improvisation (reinforcing the evils of rock music) cutting through the night air and at the end hand-clapped rhythms and screams increase in time with the writhing of flickering flame-lit bare bums.

But does any of this matter?

From the first secretly filmed ritual, that of a black mass held in the dull London commuter land of Bedford, where the camera zooms intrusively in and out of the various stages of the ritual, we know that we are not watching anything that can be defined as 'reality'. The importance of the film instead lies in the way it represents an exciting synthesis of horror, the occult and the erotic (the opening narration introducing the film as the "naked truth of black art in the modern age", a report on "Satan's unspeakable and yet sometimes erotic rites" makes this abundantly clear). No opportunity in the record of these occult rites to exhibit naked sexuality is passed up, whether this is the constantly photogenic bodies of sexy young girls in 'western' black arts (the occult marriage ceremony of 'The Church of Satan' is wearily illustrated by a naked woman lying on the alter "attended by clutch of bosomy acolytes"), or the sticky, 'primitive' sexuality of those in the developing world (at the occult finale to the inauguration of the "Queen of the Witches" in Rio, a feast of the dead where participants writhe under the influence of drink, drugs and tobacco, it is observed that "the night air carries the stench of flames, food, sex and an acrid, unnatural sweat"). At the voodoo ceremony in Louisiana the 'queen' appears as a Tina Turner look-alike, complete with flowing red dress, long black wig, and the hot booty-shaking commensurate with the image of the real 'acid queen' herself.

The 1960s pop culture obsessions with the occult and with witchcraft, later to find full expression in horror (the productions of Tigon, Hammer etc) and mainstream thriller films (James Bond epic *Live and Let Die*) are glimpsed effectively whether it be through those of the chronically poor of Sicily (a 'witch' 'speaks' through the voice of her dead nephew who has been killed in a car crash, to the families of other motor car accident victims) or the magic of the middle classes (the occult marriage rites of London bankers, salesman and chemist shop assistants) recalls the bourgeois of 'table-turning' cults of nineteenth century Europe.

Inevitably the guilt-ridden rationale for such a catalogue of occult eroticisms is revealed through Frost's hastily inserted interview with Californian cop Lieutenant David Este, who frets on camera about the increase of interest by young people in black magic. As this film was shot and re-shot around the times of the infamous Tate/LaBianca murders carried out by Charles Manson and his followers the inference is clear: social freedoms, drugs and the occult lead to "our greatest danger...human sacrifice". The penultimate sequence on the hippie rite, designed to complement such neurosis, "the

most shocking example of modern witchcraft" may be secretly filmed but is stupidly realised. As ever with mondo moralising, what starts out as being an expression of paternalistic concern through fear of the perverse practices of the modern age only produces belly laughs for the audience.

Magia Nuda

(Mondo Magic)
Dir: Alfredo & Angelo Castiglioni
Italy, 1974

The world of magic is none other than the 'African sickness', no longer seen from the point of view of Europeans but from that of the Africans themselves
Alberto Moravia

□ The first impressions of *Magia Nuda*, or *Mondo Magic* as it is known in the Anglo-Saxon world, are that the film is yet another sensationalist, greasy, exploitation mondo flick. Not least because of the images that accompanied the American video release of the film (a montage of extreme body piercings, ritual scarring and vampiric blood drinking overseen by a mystical all-seeing eye) and the tag line for the film ("A nightmare visit into the world of primitive practices") with the 'warning' message ("contains graphic depictions of shocking, erotic and/or barbaric practices that may offend the viewer") all connote a hard to resist concoction of 'sexy magic'. In addition the film is mostly recalled in the hazy memories of (mostly male) exploitation fans who remember the shock effect of these ritual practices on impressionable, if curious minds (for example Patrick McCabe in *Mondo Desperado* evokes "the risk of watching all them old tribesman beating each other senseless with poles" while alternative rock band Big Black used to recount this same scene as a between-songs filler). Most viewers of the film remember at least the circumcision rite. Scenes from the film have appeared in underground 'compilation videos', in particular the evocative shots of the Mundawi tribe's war dance and cattle rituals (see *Amok Assault Video* and Guliano Rossi and Luigi Vizzi's shameless mondo hack-compilation *Shocking Africa* for example) and so the film still has a tangible presence as a mondo paradigm.

The reality is that *Magia Nuda* is actually one of the least sensationalist mondo films produced and the nearest to 'ethnographic' that the genre ever got. The film is actually part of a trilogy by the Castiglioni brothers, Milanese twins with a background in scientific research and archaeology, the remaining films are *Africa Segreta* (*Secret Africa*) shot on 16mm and *Africa Ama*, their most commercially successful film. The shocks that *Magia Nuda* delivers to audiences are only those of the discovery of the bizarre rituals of so-called 'primitive' cultures of the world, codes that the west finds difficult to accept only because of conflicting attitudes towards death, sex, religion and the way in which these life roles intersect. It is the overall style and look of the film that gives it an air of ethnographic discourse. The shots are flat and well lit; the lighting is only used as an essential aid to securing clear footage and, unlike in most mondos, is never used expressively. The shots are similarly composed with square medium-shot composition and framing only capturing what is essential (the fact that the Castiglioni brothers engaged Eastmancolor rather than Technicolor for their cameras may have also had an impact on this). The other important ingredient is the narration, which in this instance is also understated and dry. The narration, spoken by Marc Mauro Smith, is lent a socio-philosophical quality by nature of the fact it was composed by Alberto Moravia, no stranger to mondo-style expositions of African culture and rituals. Even the opening titles lend the film an ethnographic air being simple block white trying to connote factual, scientific objectivity. The opening statements locate the film within the history of travels into

the 'dark continent' evoking "the days when Stanley dared cut through the jungle in search of Livingstone". The scene is underscored by Tom-Tom drums which we are told, as one of the Castiglioni twins' moves into view, "announce the arrival of the white man". The film has a very weird opening: while a river boat brings Africans (and one presumes the filmmakers) to the banks of the Nile, the opening notes of Old Man River can be heard. This segues into the tune known in the US and the UK as When A Child Is Born, a sickly Christmas ballad sung by Johnny Mathis (this version is named Soleado by Zacar, arranged by the Daniel Santacruz ensemble). The sentimentality of the music inaugurates the film's solemn mood, a mood which continues throughout the film. The locations of the film are grouped around four tribal areas — the Dinka and Mundawi tribes of the Sudanese White Nile; the Yanomamö tribe of the equatorial rain forests of the Amazon and sects of the Philippines and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The Castiglionis have tried to capture and display the magic rituals and practices, medicinal and sexual, of these locations with a cold calculating eye, partly with success. Music is sparely used. They have even included the occasional topical socio-cultural quote to support what they are witnessing whether it is Marshall MacLuhan's notion of the 'global village' ("the fragments of the Koran (the medium) becomes the message") or Sigmund Freud's theories of 'penis envy'. So far so 'ethnographic'. Yet this being a mondo film the veneer of scientific inquiry begins to slip away and the depiction of the rituals becomes energized by recognizable shockumentary attributes. As early as the end of the opening sequence the practices of the Mundawi, covering their children with cattle urine as an insect repellent, puffing smoke into their precious cattle's' vaginas to induce fertility, the narrator observes that we are entering a "darker realm where the difference between terror and ecstasy is meaningless and where the lynchpin of all existence is magic" (the collection and usage of cattle dung as a mystical substance echoes scenes in Jacopetti and Prosperi's *La Donna nel Mondo*). The famous sequence capturing the pogo-style warrior dance of the tribesmen is presented with the rationale that — "only slow motion does justice to the structured beauty of the race in action". Such aims may be noble and artistic but close up groin shots with the men's sexual organs flapping freely up and down code the scene from most angles as (s)exploitative. The Castiglionis claim that they only use field recordings for their soundtracks does not hold up either (in this film at least). Aside from the sad musical score by legendary Italian composer Angelo Francesco Lavagnino, which swells accordingly during emotional passages, scenes from the film resonate with splatterings of weird electro phrases (most creepily over a shot of a dead witch doctor's dried corpse lying untouched on the plain). Any 'authentic' diegetic sound recordings appear to have been amplified for effect, particularly to heighten the more stomach churning gastronomic aspects of these magic rituals (the Dinka drinking fresh cattle blood, Yanomamö munching on roasted caterpillars and spiders, an Ethiopian witch doctor suckling the nipple of an infertile woman, vomiting as part of an exorcism in Cameroon). Many mondo traits gradually emerge: animal slaughter (a giraffe and an elephant are killed and sliced up by razor-sharp spears in "a brutal assassination", birds are skewered in slow motion), violence (the finger of a Cameroon man is amputated after a demon has been massaged into it), nudity (close up shots of bouncing breasts during a ritual dance). The uncontrollable urge to discover and display the weird is clear — Yanomamö tribesmen (described as being "lost in a primordial time zone"..."let's search for them" the narrator urges) mete out an adultery punishment which consists of whacking each other over the head with *abrushi* canes until one of them falls bleeding and unconscious; the psychic surgery of Manila where operations to remove foreign objects are carried out, incredibly without

anaesthetic and by hand (in an interview for *Healter Skelter* magazine the Castiglionis admit to being unable to establish the veracity, or not, of these rituals); religious flagellations are shown in painful detail, both Hindu (a devotee is suspended by hooks through the skin of his back, a practice that inspired the Australian performance artist Stelarc, or Christian (Philippine penitents flog themselves until they bleed exhorting the flagellation of Christ). This latter scene together with the pictures of a Yanomamö women suckling a pig with her breast, clearly resurrect the spirit, ten years on, of *Mondo Cane*. The mondo devotion to the icon of the human skull continues during "endocannibalistic" practices where the bones of the dead are crushed and eaten with mashed banana. The 'magical' theme of the film is exemplified further with the usually gory witchcraft rituals, whether this documents charms made from the tusks of the slaughtered elephant (whose eye is removed so that he does not "see" the native's desecration) or the mutilation magic of Ethiopian Arabs who incise their children's eyebrows and backs to prevent illness. Meanwhile the film's devotion to 'Naked Magic' is the climax and is exhibited through Islamic sexual rituals (vaginal examinations by a Marabou fetishist mother, the brushing of the bodies of a couple having intercourse with aphrodisiac leaves), the masturbatory initiation ceremonies of novice nuns, and the guileless Legba dance rituals where the simulation/initiation to all form of humane sexuality is open and explicit. The pornographic imagination of the filmmakers is manifested throughout all of these scenes.

Magia Nuda is a memorable mondo film that still, even in an age abundant in shock TV and film, packs a punch. But the predictable finale, lamenting the fact that "magic is no longer naked" because "new myths" (planes bringing consumer goods) "dot the African's horizon" and that "gadgets are the fetishes of the new generation" is countered with a defiance that "magic will never die — not in Africa". As the Castiglioni's Land Rover and boat leave the African coast whilst natives wave them off into golden sunsets, such laments (as always) ring hollow. When the filmmakers earlier have (correctly) cursed the advent of modern development in the Amazon rain forests, and paraphrased Jacopetti and Prosperi in bidding "Amazonia farewell", they are forgetting that via such planes along such new concrete roads come Italian directors and their crews, exploiting the location for a long series of grisly "uncut!, uncensored!, untamed!" pseudo-ethnographic mondo, horror and cannibal films.

Nuova Guinea, L'Isola del Cannibali

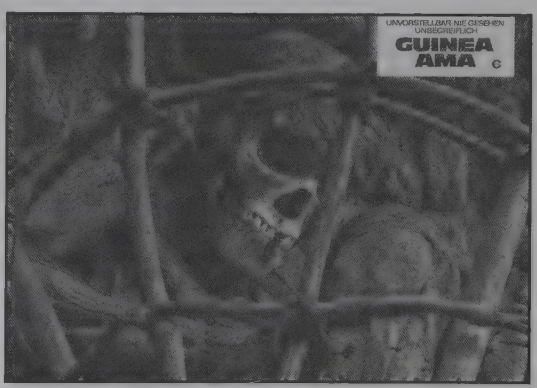
(Guinea Ama)
Dir: Akira Ide
Italy/Japan, 1974

□ This unusual addition to the mondo cannon has many curious aspects about it, bearing an uncanny resemblance to Barbet Schroeder's odd dream-like journey-into-the-unknown film *La Valée* (*The Valley Obscured by Clouds*), itself now somewhat forgotten (the soundtrack, composed by Pink Floyd is the only remaining trace). *La Valée* is about a group of affluent, bored, bourgeois hippies undertaking a long trek into the centre of New Guinea to find spiritual enlightenment and an earthly paradise — marked on the map as 'obscured by clouds'. The sequences of the film documenting the group's arrival at this place and their necessary if deceitful engagement with the natives of this location, 'played by' genuine tribes people and shot journalistically, are akin to the exploration/exploitation dichotomy of mondo ethics. In one scene the lead character Viviane becomes immersed in one of the tribal spirit dances, the masked men that gradually surround her are recognisable as those in Akira Ide's film (also as an generic iconic/image of 'primitivism — photos of these tribesmen appeared

as the sleeve artwork for the first release by British post-punk group Pop Group for example). Both films explore the drama and danger of such a remote expedition and image the depths of the 'Island of Cannibals' where the modern world collides with mysticism and man's primitive past. Perhaps a better-known aspect of the film is that certain sequences were bought and crudely replanted by Italian exploitation director, Bruno Mattei, for his *Zombie Creeping Flesh* and *Libidomania* films. The way in which the film brilliantly plays up horror and taboo via a unique European/Japanese sensibility would influence late mondo's such as *Faces of Death* and *Killing of America* and create a substantial audience in Japan for mondo movies (the film was, like many cannibal films, popular in Germany where the 'real' practice of cannibalism recently became controversial headline news).

The location of New Guinea was an obvious choice for mondo directors searching out primitive rituals and behaviour patterns not yet touched by 'civilised' progress and technological 'advancement'. The island had long held a mythological status as the final place to outlaw the accepted practice of cannibalism (one sequence in the film depicts the authorities attempts at stamping out such practices). Whichever translation of the title you prefer, man-eating certainly appears to be the theme of Ide's film. Yet despite some opening shocks representing with the taboo of cannibalism (the gruesome title frame with blood-red lettering dripping over a shot of a human skull; some scenes of a woman simultaneously nursing a baby and a putrefying maggoty corpse which she picks and nibbles from — the baby plays nonchalantly with her necklace), and the recurrence of death, the film pans out to be a broad survey of New Guinea rituals and customs all delivered in the reassuring mondo fashion. The scenes described above create a tangible amount of trepidation and anxiety, yet as with almost all mondo films this is eventually tempered with the queer, the exotic and the ridiculous. Audiences have to wait until the end of film before further cannibalistic shocks are delivered. The unique atmosphere of much of the film is what makes it an important addition to the mondo cannon and is that of Japanese horror, where supernatural fear is created out of simple 'everyday' occurrences presented with cold-eyed pathological clarity. Due to the way they are framed and displayed these simple, if perplexing to western eyes, rituals become creepy and frightening. A key aspect of this atmosphere is the soundtrack, one of the most astounding and intriguing mondo musical accompaniments ever conceived, and one that adds a vital air of unreality to the mood of the film. Fear and shock are created from combining musical instruments, sounds and electronics in a perverse manner and there are two recurring phrases in particular which exemplify this technique. The first, accompanying a trek representing the filmmaker's journey into the centre of the island, is an eerie composition featuring sudden-dramatic discordant piano chords and very fast pounding 'ethnic' drumming. The second phrase occurs during sequences depicting the funeral rites of the dead (skeletal remains and recently deceased fleshy corpse) where the music is an astounding collage of avant-electro bleeps, vocal wailing (possibly diegetic), rumbling cymbals building to a crescendo, and strange organ stabs. In addition to other evocative and scary musical themes composed by Corrado Demofonti (the woman picking at the rotting corpse sequence has some eerie flute music and a gong resonating ominously; freeze-frames of tribal members are accompanied by low single piano notes; men bloodletting their noses into the river waters to enrich it, do this in synch with some freaky experimental electronic twinkling — like *The Clangers* on speed). There is the frequent emergence of a 'cannibal island' theme written by mondo veteran Riz Ortolani. This theme has actually been appropriated from one of Ortolani's classic non-mondo scores written earlier for Umberto Lenzi's famous *giallo Cosí Dolce, Cosí*

a jaw-dropping feature. But perhaps the most astonishing use of musical backing occurs for a typically lightweight mondo diversion into the dress and adornments of the New Guinea peoples. Shots of women in modern miniskirts and men in other 'western' attire are contrasted with the painful decorations of tribal ritual in particular use of tattoos, scarification and piercings. While we watch these 'anthropological' studies of ritual in action the sound-



Perversa. The booming theme song Why? from that film is used in the finale of *Nuova Guinea*, as is another piece, a slow jazz flute motif. The incongruous use of electric guitar music, one-minute jazz-funk fusion, the next Velvet Underground-style scratching, is also

track switches to a gentle organ bossa motif, a superbly breezy luxuriant passage complete with female scat vocals more akin to a hairspray advert than an anthropological study — which may or may not be intentional.

Nuova Guinea is agreeably photographed by an Italian-Japanese team and faithfully mimics the mondo predilection for sudden freeze-frames (the 'secretly filmed' shots of illegal cannibalism in action) and slow motion (a dead man, after being wrapped in leaves, is cast into the river waters: this part of the action slows down and then freezes). The killing of animals is notable (bats wings are sliced from their torsos, which are then eaten and made into skirts; crocodiles are sliced vertically; lizards and snakes are cooked).

Like virtually all mondo films *Nuova Guinea* is filled with excuses for titillation. Native nudity is natural and needs to be shown, but cutaway close-ups of bouncing breasts, telephoto glimpses of naked washing, and long pans which linger for no obvious ethno-anthropological purpose over the breasts of young girls as they moan orgasmically at the pain of the tattoo/scarring rituals, fail to be compensated by a short sequence on male penis covers. A section on sexual transgressions is similarly exploitative: once the point has been made that homosexuality is accepted in the interior as well as in more modern parts of the island, it seems crass to introduce some camp, silly backing music. The macho conservatism of mondo directors now emerges: the arrival of "feminist" and "suffragette" concepts in New Guinea is also derided.

Despite this, *Nuova Guinea* is a fascinating and largely original reading of shockumentary filmmaking, certainly one of its most haunting and disturbing treatments. Yet as the film closes and we recall the parts of the film that echo *Mondo Cane* (lyrical aerial shots of landscapes, males being molested by females, the crushing of hog's skulls before they are feasted upon, the recognisable features of some of the natives, the arrival of American tourists wanting to photograph the 'rituals') the viewer is slightly relieved by the shots of the arrival of the island's independent status. Perhaps no longer will white (or brown or yellow) men with probing lenses feel the need to capture on film the culture of the last cannibalistic remnants of the Stone Age.

Appendix The Mondo Soundtrack & Considerations on the Documentary Film by Gualtiero Jacopetti

THE MONDO SOUNDTRACK
bittersweet symphonies of death

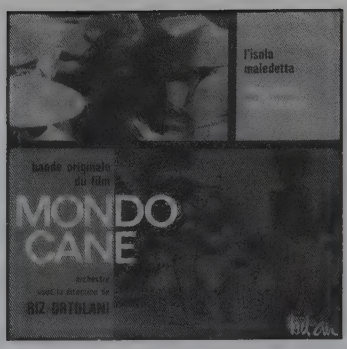
Music is the opium of the cinema
Jean Rouch

Music tells a story. It is not a filler
Gualtiero Jacopetti

Think of the simplicity of Riz Ortolani's More or the 'advertisement' style of Umiliani's Ma-nah-Ma-nah: these are truly spontaneous tracks
Augusto Martelli

Riz Ortolani

AS THE REVIEWS and comments in this book have already alluded, the soundtrack of shockumentary films, in particular the music, forms an absolutely essential component of the overall artistic success of mondo films. It was no accident that the theme tune composed for the foremost shockumentary film *Mondo Cane*, Ti Guardero' nel Cuore, became an enormous commercial and artistic success. This theme may have originally been improvised for a tiny part of the film (a scene concerning chicks being dyed col-

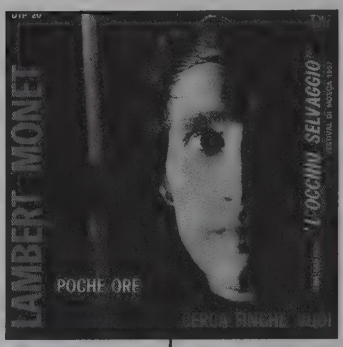


ours for Italian Easter celebrations) but it became, like so much of the film, an icon for all subsequent mondo films. The basic sound concept, a counterpoint between the shock, brutality and violence of images, and the sweetness and delicacy of the music became a significant 'effect', always copied (sometimes with success) but rarely deployed with the same adroitness as in the films of Jacopetti and Prosperi (Jacopetti's often stated belief that music should never appear at the same time as speech and narration, was usually the fist principal to be ignored). The mondo soundtrack must echo the images. It must be global, violent, savage, lyrical, sentimental, ironic, melodic. It must sometimes complement the scenes and at other times it must counter them. Italian film music in general has become highly regarded, perhaps unsurprising in an age when the film soundtrack is largely constructed from the latest popular chart music, or retro salvagings from the hits of the past, the dreaded 'compilation score'. The soundtracks have become highly collectible, those from the fifties and sixties being the most desired. This is partly due to the acute scarcity of original vinyl copies of soundtracks from this 'golden age'. An odd Italian tax law decreed that all unsold copies of pressings of 1,000 or under were to be destroyed rather than discounted. Hence, many copies of valuable and great cinematic musical treasures were melted down and crushed. The more romantic (and musical) reason for the collectability of these items is down to the fact that the rich variety, invention, experimentation and originality of Italian arrangers, composers and orchestras is second to none (the cover artwork was often beautiful too). As is becoming clear with the help of this scramble for original material and an active reissue market, Italian film musicians were often capable of more originality in a single piece of cinematic scoring than twenty Anglo-Saxon efforts put together. Original labels such as *CAM* and *Cinevox* together with new specialists *Dagored*, *Right Tempo*, *Cinedelic*, *Hexacord* and publications such as the essential *Il Giaguaro* with websites like *italiansoundtracks.com* have kept the music alive. Francesco Adinolfi's *Mondo Exotica* is the bible of the movement astutely linking Italian film music with the contemporary lounge/cocktail/ambient generation (what Alessandro Casella calls the "Jet Set Soundtrack") and influencing contemporary artists as varied as British groups Portishead, Pulp and DJs Montepulciano Club, American auteur Beck and Japanese combo Pizzicato Five. While understandably it is the 'classic' Italian maestros that have been fore grounded in this rediscovery — Nino Rota's Fellini scores and the immense body of work by Ennio Morricone — there are plenty more masterpieces to discover, treasure and enjoy. Mondo films were one of the pre-eminent genres for this musical revolution incorporating bossa nova, jazz, orchestral, pop and rock, styles which expressed, in a repressive social and cultural milieu, taboo forms through music. The lack of 'dialogue' in mondo footage allowed the composers of mondo music to express, ex-

plore and experiment and it is of regret that of the soundtrack it is the narration that is frequently given attention. The following is an attempt at redressing this, an outline of the principal 'mondo maestros' and their work in the context of the shockumentary film tradition. The cliché was that if someone noticed the music in a film, the composer was not doing his job. In the world of mondo movie soundtracks this rule is not so much bent as mangled out of all recognition. Beautifully.

Riz Ortolani

In the UK and US Riz Ortolani is a criminally overlooked composer, arranger and conductor, one of the few Italian composers to be awarded an Oscar (the theme song from *The Yellow Rolls Royce*, Forget Domani). Born in Pesaro and trained classically at the Rossini Conservatory, Ortolani composed more for *Mondo Cane* (one of the most covered songs of all time) alluding that his melodic gifts are arguably superior even to Morricone's. Ortolani worked successfully on all of the Jacopetti and Prosperi mondo films, and cleverly advanced Lavagnino's 'exotic' documentary scores, tightly synchronizing musical style with location. This was sometimes done in comic ways (the Singapore snake market in *Mondo Cane*, the animal paradises in *Africa Addio*), others dramatic and tragic (the destruction of Congo mission camps and the animal massacres in *Africa Addio*). His amazing score for *Mondo Candido*, recently reissued, resurrected his collaboration with Jacopetti and Prosperi and provides a surreal backing for their odd tale about Voltaire's eternal optimist Candide. Trademark sweeping lush orchestrations are matched with upbeat pop shuffles and fuzz-guitar riffing mixed with sexy grunts and groans echoing the hero's drifts through disasters and a narrative that defies time and space. His work with Jacopetti and Prosperi is notably great in its contrasts between on-screen action and soundtrack where the concept of underscoring is wilfully ignored. Ortolani made memorable contributions to a range of other Italian genre movies in the 1960s and 1970s. His abstract music for Lucio Fulci's *Una Sull' Altra*, described by the *Monthly Film Bulletin* as "making the most of otherwise gratuitous sex scenes", is an exemplar of the skill with which Italian film composers raised the level of an otherwise mediocre movie. The offbeat plaintive background offered by the sax driven score is typical of the strong atmosphere created by Italian composers. Ortolani also wrote the music for many other mondo classics (despite his efforts to deny this) including Proia's *Ecco* and *Realta' Romanzesca*, parts of Ide's *Nuova Guinea L'Isola dei Cannibali*, Arthur Davis' *Brutes and Savages* where a camp disco backing was entirely appropriate for the absurdity of the film, and even Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*, where one of his most beautiful and morbid themes was offered (when I asked Ortolani personally about the music for this film he claimed he "could not remember it"). In *Africa Addio* Ortolani's superb exoticism of the earlier Jacopetti and Prosperi films is replaced by a more 'tribal' sound that incorporates orchestrations but



also intense moments of percussion, driven by what Moravia describes as the Tom Tom's "deep monotonous meditative beat" exhorting (perhaps stereotypically) "a rhythm, now an indivisible, ingrained part of industrial civilization comes straight from prehistoric archaic times".

Piero Umiliani

Piero Umiliani, if remembered at all by British or Americans, is noted as the composer of the seemingly banal three-note Mah Na' Mah Na' a 1969 hit single combining cheesy female vocal refrains, jaunty organ and the sound of a man singing through his nose (later used on *The Muppet Show*). Umiliani was in fact a brilliant and inventive composer of film and library music with a background — like many Italian film composers — in modern jazz (see also his tribute to Duke Ellington). Mah Na' Mah Na' originally appeared in the score for one of the best classic period mondos, Luigi Scattini's 'social study' of sexual behaviour in Scandinavia *Svezia: Inferno e Paradiso*. The tune was improvised at the last minute for the movie by Umiliani's superb orchestra (including Carlo Pes and Alessandro Alessandroni). His score for the film is a typical example of lightweight cinematic fayre being afforded a deep and varied mix of beat, shake, lounge, bossa easy and jazz variations featuring Gato Barbieri on sax. Umiliani's score for Scattini's *Angeli Bianchi...Angeli Neri* was of equal strength combining pulsating 'primitive' rhythms, moody ballads, mysterious easy jazz tunes and the remarkable throwaway song sung by Mark David Now I'm On My Own. Umiliani's own superb organ playing, with that of Antonella Vannucchi is always at the forefront and the importance of the score (for such a specialist type of film) is underlined by the line-up for the recordings, which as well as including an entire Brazilian ensemble led by Wilson Das Neves, included Harmonica player Franco de Gemini, and the choruses of Nora Orlandi, Alessandro Alessandroni and the virtuoso vocals of Morricone regular Edda Dell'Orso. All this was tragically replaced in the American version of the film *Witchcraft '70* by a weak and derivative horror score. Umiliani, whose career began when he was hired by the godfather of the modern Italian film soundtrack Armando Trovajoli, also scored for a vast range of pseudo-mondo films including Joe D'Amato's sex travelogue *Eva Nera/Erotic Eva*.

"Listen to real music, played with real instruments," Umiliani once advised, a message today's film producers would do well to heed.

Piero Piccioni

Piccioni was the son of a Christian democrat MP and as prolific and wide-ranging a film composer as Morricone. He was one of the first Italian composers to employ jazz (rather than classical, ballet, opera) as the background to film scores (there is an astonishing example of this on Barry 7's *Connectors 2* compilation),

and his original approach began when he improvised music to documentaries by Gian Luigi Polidori, indicating the open, experimental style essential to the free-spirit of his mondo film music. Piccioni scored a superb example of this exotic for Ugo Liberatore's mondo-esque erotic film *Bora Bora* inspired in part by the work of de Falla, Ravel and Debussy, the originators of the exotic mode, integrating Polynesian rhythms and textures with sweeping orchestral passages to the film's soundtrack. Piccioni wrote the music for Luigi Vanzi's *Mondo di Notte* incorporating original if standard waltz themes and a fantastical Mike Sammes' style reworking of the standard I'm An Old Cow Hand, which the composer Johnny Mercer would have no doubt winced at.

Angelo Francesco Lavagnino

Lavagnino, classically trained at Milan's Verdi Conservatory, and a composer of over 300 film scores encompassing *Peplum*, Westerns, erotic and sci-fi, is an important figure in the shockumentary tradition, not so much for his scores for mondo films which are rare, but for his introduction to the documentary tradition of the concept of the 'exotic' soundtrack. He wrote the music for *Magia Verde* and *L'Impero del Sole*. When one British reviewer lambasted Lavagnino's score for pre-mondo success *Continente Perduto* (*Lost Continent*), a collection of symphonically reworked field recordings, for "exploiting the worst kinds of exotic Hollywood cliché as well as adding some of its own such as a choir which combines singing with screaming" little did they realise they were articulating precisely one of mondos most exciting attributes.

Lavagnino composed the music for Angelo and Alfredo Castiglioni's *Magia Nuda*. Although the principle theme for the film was credited as Soleado by the Daniel Santatcruz Ensemble, who according to another Italian maestro of the exotic Augusto Martelli (former arranger and companion of Italian diva Mina) "took care of copying everything from me". Augusto Martelli's *Il Dio Serpente* (*The Serpent God*) is still regarded as a paradigm exotic soundtrack.

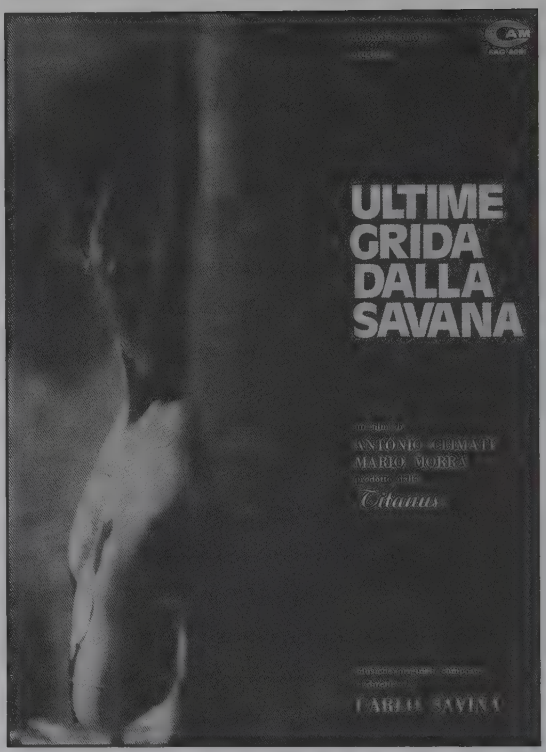
Bruno Nicolai

Musical director Bruno Nicolai, the foremost director of film orchestras was notable for his

collaborations with Ennio Morricone (at one time a rumour circulated that 'Bruno Nicolai' was one of Morricone's pseudonyms). Nicolai did indeed work on *Per un Pugno di Dollari/A Fistful of Dollars* and *Il Buono, il Brutto, il Cattivo/The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* aswell as countless other spaghetti westerns. But Nicolai is much more than a 'poor man's Morricone'. He worked as musical director on Tinto Brass' infamous *Salòn Kitty* and composed the fabulous score for Jesus Franco's kitsch reading of sadism *Marquis de Sade's Philosophy in the Boudoir*, a kaleidoscope of easy listening, Latin and psycho-pop renditions. It is the weirder commissions that are attracting interest from the re-issuers in particular Nicolai's demimonde works such as *Femmine Insaziabili* and *Agente Speciale K*, usually featuring the unmistakable voice of Edda Dell'Orso. Nicolai set up his own Gemelli label to issue his vast film, radio and TV commissions from where you can still buy vinyl and CD copies of his varied and beautiful work. Nicolai conceived the superb kaleidoscopic music for *Il Pelo nel Mondo* loaded with as many cues as the film has scenes from the cartoon slapstick of the title theme to New Orleans jazz, sultry jazz-blues, very fast vibe shuffles, cod-Orientalism, cod-Mexicana and the superbly kitsch Alla Mozart which reforms the baroque beauty of La Belle Epoch into the accompaniment for a striptease. In directing the score for *Mondo Cane No.2*, derided by one reviewer as "obtrusive chorus and orchestra scoring in the best traditions of the genre", Nicolai cemented his reputation as one of the prominent mondo musicians.

Guido & Maurizio De Angelis

Terence Hill and Bud Spencer, an Italian Western fun double act in the spirit of Butch and Sundance, except a lot uglier, were one of the many successful Italian imitations of American genre film. Their adventures were played to a musical backdrop provided by sometime moustachioed brothers Guido



and Maurizio De Angelis. This fantastically prolific duo have scored the standard (for Italian musicians) vast range of film styles, most notably police thrillers (Margheriti's *Con la Rabbia agli Occhi/Anger in His Eyes* for example) and sex comedies (Andrea Bianchi's *La Moglie di Mio Padre/Confessions of a Frustrated Housewife*). Later on the brothers bizarrely operated under the moniker of *Oliver Onions* and issued material on their own label; a veritable cottage industry of music instead of olive oil and *Chianti*. Their uncanny ability at combining a vast array of styles and moods is exemplified by the brothers incredible scoring for Antonio Climati and Mario Morra's *Savana Violenta,* here somehow incorporating acoustic pop, children's choirs and orchestrations, growled Dixie anthems, 'Ameriarchi', samba and squelching moog motifs. At times the music veers into the territory of easy listening, against a backdrop of some of the least 'easy' images ever committed to celluloid, and this is no mean feat.

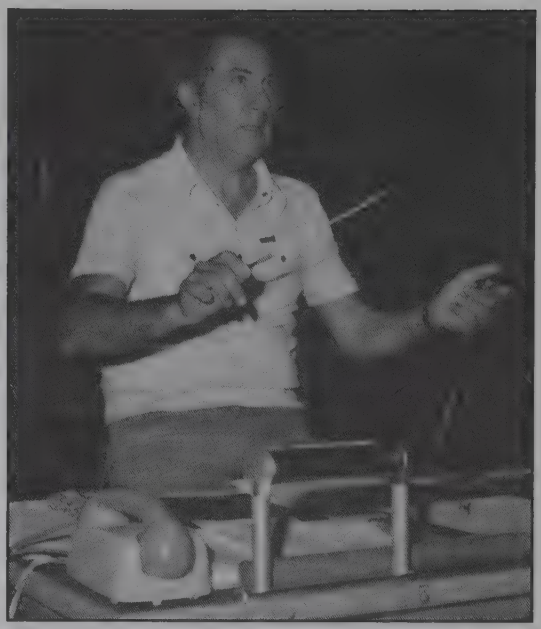
Carlo Savina

Savina was for many years the director of the orchestra for the Italian state television and radio company RAI and provided the fairly standard music for Blasetti's pre-mondo film *Europa di Notte*. However, when Savina received the commission for Climati and Morra's *Ultime Grida dalla Savana* his powerful, sweeping orchestrations were aligned with images both gruelling and elegant. The film's two ballads stand out as typically odd counterpoints to the often troubling images. My Love, sung by Anne Collin is an acoustic song with a counter-culture Woodstock mood typical of Joan Baez, while Leave The Rest To Me rocks along quite convincingly led by wild guitar and a meaty vocal from Gilbert Kopland that is reminiscent of Barry McGuire.

Ennio Morricone

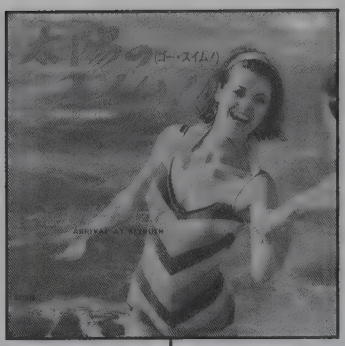
Morricone, born in Rome in 1928 and classically trained, is a legendary figure in the world of film music and one of the few Italians (along with Nino Rota) to enjoy international recognition. His prolific status is as legendary as his scores for Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns, and those directed by Pontecorvo, Pasolini, Roland Joffe, Giuseppe Tornatore and Brian De Palma.

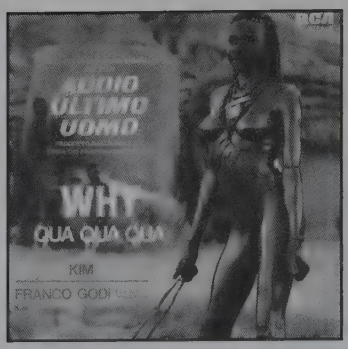
Given Morricone's ability to score for any type of film or TV production it was inevitable that he would interact with the mondo genre and so he contributed the music for Paolo Cavara's *Malamondo* and this too enjoyed his unique approach — a blend of offbeat vocal effects and orchestrations from the symphonic to the bizarre. His unique melodic and dramatic gifts were lent to this film where references to a range of cinematic musical motifs are made, from spaghetti western to atonal ensemble pieces (the glaring faces of the 'flaming youth' of the film's opening), jazz, twanging guitars, lush romanticism (the main theme), beat, a bossa waltz, tropical (the miscegenation scene) all dedicated to the film's contrasts (barbarism and beauty, mirth and madness).



In addition to these there have been notable contributions to the mondo musical cannon by Gianni Marchetti, for example, *L'Occhio Selvaggio* (*The Wild Eye*), Cavara's savage critique of mondo ethics. Marchetti's music for the film eschews the common practice for one overriding theme to be repeated, offering instead a number of striking motifs from the opening sparse, chilling single piano note and jazz piece, augmented by stabs of shrieking vocal backing, to the swingy romanticism of Barbara's Theme, imbued with bitter tragedy once the listener knows the true fate of the characters. Perhaps the most striking piece is Bali Street — a funky sitar driven number which reviewer Harold Stern could "hardly wait for the jazz boys to get to work on". Notti Di Saigon is a psychedelic riff-driven shake. La Fine Dell'Oriente brilliantly mimics Ortlolani's method while the plaintive reverb guitar of L'Ultimo Appuntamento recalls The Shadows. It is no surprise that the score attracted the interest of British lounge compilers such as Patrick

This page **Composer Carlo Savina.**





Whitaker and Martin Green. The brilliant Franco Godi, provider of music for the popular fumetti (Italian cartoons) Bruno Bozzetto's *Il Signor Rossi* and Osvaldo Cavandoli's *La Linea*, also scored the music for the Castiglioni brothers *Addio Ultimo Uomo* including the childish song Why and a superbly daft fast guitar/vocal number Qua Qua Qua which also made it into one of the *Il Signor Rossi* shorts, two more disparate films one would be unable to find.

The music that accompanied Italian cinema exotica/erotica is now a staple of lounge/DJ culture. This is understandable as it evokes the free loving sixties philosophy epitomised by more open euro attitudes towards sex and sexuality. In the 1970s, renegade director Aristide Massaccesi made the 'Black Emanuelle' films, harder copies of Just Jaeckin's legendary 1974 original. The remarkable thing about composer Nico Fidenco, the composer of the music for these films, was that he was a successful and respectable crooner on the Modugno/Sergio Franchi mould (his visage appears on posters in early mondo films) before he turned his hand to soft porn or 'exotica-erotica' scoring (as well as that of the spaghetti western). His music is effective in creating a fake atmosphere of sensuality dedicated to both director and composer's attraction to an exoticism of the 'other' (naked African, Oriental, Latin American girls) which, common to the period, is really a sneaky use of the anthropological to display sex and nudity for exploitative and titillating means. While the preponderance of 'modern' electronic instruments has reduced the sensuality of this music somewhat, the Come Back! rhythm is a pumping disco track worthy of the modern dance floor. Thus what started with Lavagnino's 'innocent' exotic exploration soundtracks reached its nadir in the sexploitation of 1970s cult cinema. The Italian soundtrack in this field, like the cinema it accompanied, never properly recovered.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE DOCUMENTARY FILM by Gualtiero Jacopetti *edited by Mark Goodall*

A DOCUMENTARY film today must keep into account a new mode of expression which has come to the international motion pictures scene, and on this scene I will consider both the professional and amateur experience.*

In short, the 'ugly' documentary is now 'understood' by almost everybody. The documentary 'beautiful at any cost', largely rhetoric, predictable, and only formally correct, is now dead. Today we try to document from a more realistic angle, with quickness of expression. Without pretending to produce work at the level of Grierson, Flaherty or Dreyer, a new school of the young and not so young have applied themselves to an interest, which is after all, the true essence of the documentary. The documentary is one of the

noblest expressions of our era. We want from a documentary truth and sincerity. This is not always possible; in fact, it is very, very difficult.

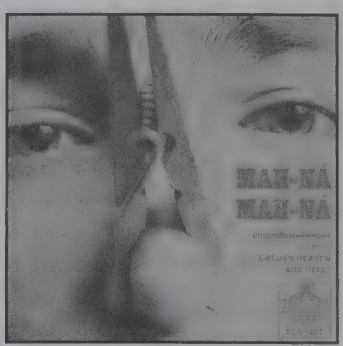
And why? Because the documentary is a personal and subjective expression and we cannot expect from it the whole truth. It will express a certain truth, it will reflect a slice of life, throw a beam of light on one aspect of the truth. My *Africa Addio* may serve as an example. What counts is that the work be true from the point of view of its author: in its realisation, in its realisation becoming reality, a form of inner truth which determines and shapes spectacular and poetic images.

What is important today is the truth in the individual work, a truth that must of course respect the facts that must be documented (otherwise we would be in the field of 'fiction'), but reflect also the inner truth of its author. The documentary must be free, quick, lively, and speak with a loud, clear, recognizable voice. It fears nobody, it expresses its own truths, it expresses them well, in the best form. It has learned its technique and now it wants to make use of it, wants to live it, in its wholeness, in the new adventure awaiting its directors, its collaborators, its viewers.

The documentary film is, like many other means of cinematographic expression, a way to communicate our ideas — moral, social, political, or simply psychological — to our public. It is sometimes felt that the documentary film, which appears stark, severe, devoid of scenographic tinsels and literary pretensions, lacks ideas and is easy to make. This is not true. Exceptions determined by truly innovative talents are rather frequent: in this case, even if the technique is not regular or a hundred per cent perfect the film may turn out to be beautiful, in fact even better than if the director had been obedient to the accepted rules. The documentary film does not always have artistic pretensions. I feel that the documentary is that much more beautiful, therefore more valid, if it closely and clearly reflects the idea that has determined its origin. In some cases, the various ideas practically blend together: for instance, an inquest on contemporary habits may end up in a sociological inquiry. The success is determined by its author. It is the director who must impose his personal style; suitable, convincing, and above all, which successfully expresses what he wants to say.

I believe that the first step towards the success of a documentary is our interior clearness. In other words, I believe we must, first of all, look inside ourselves and evaluate what we want and can express. Otherwise we risk confusion and uneven work, work that may be beautiful only in part. Chance is sometime a good friend and adviser of the documentary director, but it can also be his worst enemy. It is dangerous to rely on chance too much. What is necessary is dialectic clarity. By this expression however, I do not mean something like political engagement. I mean whatever is clear, neat, precise, both in the memory and in the intellect.

It is obvious that, if I want to make a docu-



mentary concerning Christmas celebrations in various places and villages in Italy, I shall have to begin with a long trip throughout the country and 'document' myself thoroughly, otherwise I may do something beautiful, perhaps even very beautiful, but lacking a basic idea and above all, risking to neglect 'this' in favour of 'that'. What has struck me in certain circumstances (situations, external or internal; my mood, the physical, the emotional, all relative to a particular moment) may steal the place of an important detail, much more interesting and compelling for the film. In other words, I may find certain aspects more striking than others. But it is not certain that the more striking aspects are the best, the most exact and appropriate. In order to separate the best from the merely good I must, I repeat, 'document' myself before starting, with books, reports, newspaper and magazine pictures. I must go to the library and there look-up under 'Christmas' the texts that are closer to the idea I have in mind. When I have done all this, I can start my work with some peace of mind. After that I will have to think about the aspects that the books did not consider, aspects which will emerge in light of what I intend to express in my film work. In the meantime I must gradually develop my original idea. It is best, and I do it frequently, to write down an 'outline', a 'story'. All we need are a few pages, a few notes, but these pages and these notes will grow little by little and we will finally obtain an almost complete treatment. That is to say (let's continue with the Christmas example): the initial story, three short pages, will briefly describe Christmas in Milan, Naples, Bologna, in the Friuli hamlet and the Sicilian village. I have now quick notations, rapid images. The actual treatment may start with the reproductions of well known Christmas paintings by the brush of celebrated artists of the past and end on close-ups of children's happy faces, with the human material 'selected' and 'edited' in the screenplay-writing phase.

The actual production will bring more surprises. At this point we must take into account everything: people who do not wish to be photographed, local authorities who may refuse permission to film the scene you have in mind, and so on. The material, now ready for the editor, for the musical score, and for the narration will be perhaps ninety percent different in its scenario from what we had in mind originally, as we cannot always impose our total will onto social and geographic facts and places far away. Yet the initial determining idea must still exist; or perhaps at this point, it may have been totally reversed. This makes no difference. What counts is that the idea must exist and the documentary must have something to say. Otherwise it will become a useless promenade, a technical exercise.

Before starting to film a documentary I must ask myself this: which aspect of this particular place do I intend to bring out? The ugly or the beautiful? The pleasant or the unpleasant? The traditional or the new? This is the basic question: this defines almost the entire success of my work. I think that the central idea (dialectic, basic, or whichever term you want to use in order to describe it) is not conditioned by a technique; on the contrary the technique is determined by the idea. Only if I have the 'idea' will I be in a position to carry out a free work, and my field of action will widen. I can find and discard many different solutions. I will be able to invent new situations and finally give a personal interpretation to the subject. But in order to do this, a serious and deep knowledge of the subject matter is necessary. Theory, it is true, in the documentary film has often contributed greatly, from Grierson to Rotha. But these are exceptional examples. We must limit ourselves to the average work and, on the basis of our current common sense, consider what we can do with our own forces, our background, our culture, our artistic sensitivity, our technical knowledge. Without technique it is impossible to produce a good documentary, unless we possess a figurative talent so revolutionary, so new and daring

that it is capable of reversing all grammatical and syntactical rules governing this fascinating and subjective means of expression. The master documentarist must possess all these qualities: technical expertise, aesthetic flair, culture, newness of ideas and subjects.

And this is indeed a lot for one person!

In life it is difficult to have everything at once. So we will perhaps have novel ideas and not so much technical background or vice versa. It is important, however, not to be hopelessly mediocre. The documentary cannot be mediocre. It is clear from the very beginning whether a documentary is 'well made' or if it is 'worthless'. It can be clear from the narration, especially if it is inflated and pretentious. It can be evident by its colour, the quality of the photography, even the smallest detail, like repetitious zooms that create discomfort to the viewer, or shots that stay on the screen for interminable lengths, like in some of those boring art documentaries. The documentary, by its very nature, cannot be totally objective. It could only be so if it were made by a monkey who, operating a camera from a balcony aimed at the street below, for hours and days, came up at the end of the exposure with a thousand feet of film 'document' of what happened in the street. The material filmed by the monkey will have no shape, no meaning. It needs to be put into the hands of an expert to be manipulated, edited, to have a story added, music; in other words to be redone. And while it is being redone, the documentary will have a further ideological development. These 'handlers' will end up with still another documentary which reflects their idea of that particular street.

Saying this, I do not mean that the documentary consists solely of the editing (as some critics were convinced some years ago). It is, however, clear that this 'finishing' work is not at all marginal. It completes the preparation and the production, it does not add useless frills, but instead depth and definition to the original idea of the author.

When my critics say that they do not like

my documentaries because they are not objective, they are not merely splitting hairs. They are simply being partisan, or rather, non-objective themselves. Because my political ideas are not the same as theirs, they disapprove of my work, using objectivity as an excuse, and in so doing they contribute to, and strengthen the truism that a documentary is documentation. If, on the other hand, the documentary, even if non-objective, reflects their own social and political views, then they will find it nevertheless beautiful and the 'modification of reality' will become for them (rightly so), interpretation, But in my case too there is an interpretation, even if I do not share the ideas of Eisenstein and of Pudovkin. Therefore, if they accept the changes in the work of others, they should accept it also in mine.

Alain Resnais, the great author of *Last Year at Marienbad* made a documentary on the Nazi concentration camps — *Night and Fog* — very beautiful, very intense. If a direc-

This page **Gualtiero Jacopetti.**

tor had filmed (provided he could have found the material) a documentary on the Soviet concentration camps, many of those critics who (rightly) praised Resnais' work, would probably have criticised the other director's work, for showing some truths which they, because of their political ideas, prefer not to show to the public. And this is why information, in the hand of the documentary director, is truly portentous and it is sad that too many documentarists, particularly in the case of the amateurs, who by their very position can do what they want, express what they please, should come up with stories so trite, so common, and useless. Objectivity, whatever the documentary's style and level, is always a convenient excuse for some critics, or even for the public. A totally objective documentary is impossible. If it existed, it would consist of several feet of senseless images. When Cesare Zavattini — who has only written books and screenplays, but never directed a conventional film, or a documentary — theorized on "shadowing" (the following of a person by a detective) he was expressing his views. He thought that all that was necessary to make a beautiful film or documentary was to "shadow" someone during his day, from his house to his office to his return home: the film would appear by itself. His theory seems to me excessively naive, and also a little gratuitous. Aside from the fact that when this someone is at home we cannot know what he is doing (and if he takes us home with him, it follows that the "shadowing" is fictitious and artificial), the film imagined by Zavattini lacks that creative synthesis, which alone can give life to the final work.

Similar theories gave birth in France to *cinema-vérité*, which in turn determined the success of the *nouvelle vague*. However, the French directors have proved to be more creative than their Zavattini-influenced Italian colleagues, and while the latter have produced *I Misteri di Roma* (not particularly incisive or eloquent, with limited spectacular appeal), the French directors, with an eye to the Dziga Vertov theories and another to their changing society, have created elegant, funny, ironic, dramatic works, all extremely realistic. In other words, just because they have transcended the myth of 'realism at any cost', they have been able to create films full of an effective and forceful realism, appreciated by public and critics alike.

Even in the most recent films belonging to

the *nouvelle vague* it is possible to recognize several influences of a healthy and constructive documentarism. Think of that admirable film *Adieu Philipine!* by Jacques Rozier. Several sequences are shot in the street, with a telephoto lens, so that the two young girls, the main characters, were unaware of being filmed. Their strolls through the middle of the Parisian crowds, the chit-chat of these attractive teenagers, are a miracle of fresh documentarist ingenuity. It is not hard to film these scenes: it is difficult to have the basic idea.

Many Italian documentarists instead have an ideological weight and are a little pretentious on account of our culture. In Italy, no offence meant, critics, directors, and people in the business, believe that our movies are, or rather have been, among the best in the world. But if we consider today's average production we have no cause for rejoicing. Nothing appears genuine; there is nothing 'original' in the best sense of the word. We fluctuate between imitation 007 and spaghetti westerns, from third-rate slapstick to exotic documentaries inspired by Quilici, Marcellini, Guerrasio, Jacopetti: a gloomy picture, indeed. I would like to say this: a civilization, whatever its origin and its development, must feed from a common cultural source, lymph which favours the flowering of the strongest, healthiest, most exuberant forces. If my aim is to conduct polite conversation in a fashionable drawing-room, and expose brilliant ideas and sparkling concepts, I must first of all be conversant in the language, then know the style (good manners, what can be said and what cannot be said, in other words, the code of politeness).

In Italy, the field of documentaries does not have a common cultural basis. This is why we have a few exceptional but isolated works, and a lot of standard production (at low standards, of course). Amateurs indirectly appear to have been conditioned by this influence, in most cases, negatively. This influence can be detected in the choice of subjects, which is the simplest and surest gauge for finding the underlying cultural patterns, the literary and mental attitudes.

What is the best way to develop a taste for the right choice of the subject matter: new, alive, modem, captivating, exciting, amusing, spectacular?

There is only one way, as old as the world: look around, constantly, at any hour of the day. At the same time refine your taste, add to your culture. Read a lot: newspapers and magazines for practical information, but also books of all kinds: poetry, novels, essays. This is what makes us free. Culture makes us free. It opens our mind. It shows life in its different aspects, while ignorance, which breeds commonplace thinking, prefers to leave them dormant, unexplored, dead. The best and newest subjects usually have been found, discovered, invented by people more advanced culturally. So, if chance may be of help once, the second time it is of no use, it will deceive nobody. Whoever lasts in time has the necessary foundations to enable him to survive, considering that it is not so easy to survive in this field. The only way to survive is the discovery of a good subject, new, different, unique. I don't mean being different at any cost, but to give some measure of freshness to a fact, a situation, which we have all seen before, but since forgotten, and that we now recall through the images of an unexpected documentary, which pleases us, which will please whoever made it, and whoever commissioned it. Finally, if the choice of a subject can be occasionally a matter of chance (like a tale overheard in a crowd), it is more often the result of conscious research, not motivated merely by a whim, but stemming from an inner need to show that we are alive and present in the world we live in. The documentary language is not simple. Measure, sense of balance, good taste, class:

Previous page **Jacopetti at the press conference for the Japanese release of *Mondo Candido*.**

sometimes in ten minutes we must prove what we can do! Without a story, actors, extravaganzas, we must yield a hundred per cent, stop-watch the length of the shots, never forget the rhythm. Boredom is a great enemy of the documentary. Whoever creates boredom in a documentary is not a director, he has no calling for this kind of visual show because making a documentary is indeed an enthusiastic feat, and, in spite of all its difficulties, it is possible to be carried away and improvise forgetting the 'critical' analysis to which I have referred before. By saying critical analysis, I don't mean to imply that you must be a college professor, or pedantically watch all your colons and semicolons. I rather mean to say that once the improvisation season is over, the more mature and proficient season must follow, when one must acknowledge a truth and express its full potential. That is, you can be a poet without writing verses even if you are a bookkeeper.

To make a good documentary it is important to love the cinema, intelligently and with sensitivity. Love the cinema but recognize its limits, and confronting ourselves with these limits, find within it our liveliest and sincerest aspirations. There are many kinds of love: the conventional, which leads to a state of exaltation and the one that, while loving, can still see the faults and the limitations. This is perhaps the best kind, because it leads to understanding. The documentary cannot tolerate deceits, frauds, betrayals. With the conventional movie it is possible sometimes to deceive the public and critics. This is impossible in a documentary, which is so structured that it is necessary, like in a sonnet, to go over each phrase, each scene, to decant every drop of meaning, to reduce everything to the essential, to its purest expression. And it is well known that, without inspiration, without feeling and participation, it is impossible to synthesize, and I should add that synthesis is the basis of poetic necessity. Those who have something to say must say it right away, without long introductory sequences, without technical affectations, in a simple, direct language. I have noticed for example, the many contradictions existing in a so-called objective documentary *Uccellacci e Uccellini* by Pasolini. You may remember that at a certain point the director has inserted in his film a newsreel section depicting the funeral of Italian Communist leader Togliatti's funeral. It is a beautiful piece — certainly beyond the ability of the one, or several nameless people who filmed it. Yet it is contradictory, because it reflects action while it happens, chaotic, and meaningless, as is always the case when it is not seen through the clear and rational vision of the artist. We see in the film people behaving irrationally, religiously, irreligiously, in front of Togliatti's bier. There are scenes pathetic and funny, pitiful and laughable. It is an excellent newsreel; objective of course but full of contradictions, of mystery. In fact in the case of the documentary we would have seen the interpretation of the scene by the director and we would have seen the 'right' way (for the director) to behave in front of Togliatti's corpse. We would have seen Jacopetti's way and the anti-Jacopetti way. The best way would have been, certainly, not the one that follows the cultural and political voices of the day, but the most valid and effective from the artistic viewpoint.

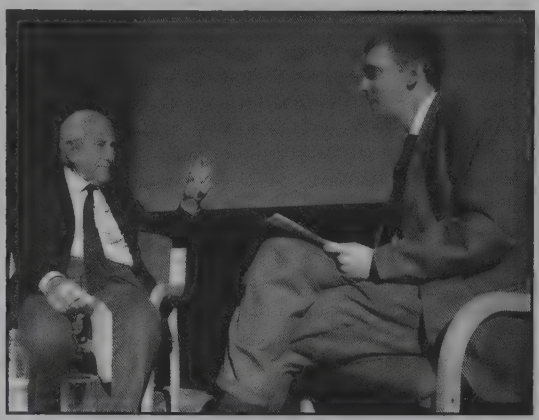
I will end with these considerations. I hope that you have followed me to this point and that you see the truth as I see it, namely, that without enthusiasm, without love, it is impossible to create anything that is good and lasting. There can only be attempts, or imitations. The real talent does not consist of a couple of clichés, or a few technical solutions that are fashionable today and ridiculous tomorrow. A true talent can ripen by degrees only, little by little, fed by good readings and by good movies. The most important, the greatest engagement is with oneself, with our own maturity. Whether a documentary transforms itself into a film of social, artistic, politic, historical or ethnographic research is not important: what counts is our attitude confronting our subject, our being artists,

men, culturally responsible people. If, on the written page, it is at times permissible to be obscure and to play with words then on the screen we must be as clear as light, and understand and make the public understand what we want to say. We must never contraband a touristic film for an ethnographic one, nor align ourselves culturally and politically in one direction when our beliefs are elsewhere. Commitment to ourselves therefore is vital: this means work, work and more work, and a large amount of self-criticism.

In conclusion, what I have said up to now is what I have always practiced while working on my documentaries. I have always looked at the facts with a journalist's curiosity, but later I have registered them according to my personal opinion, my leading idea. Leaving the essential truth unchanged, I have been using the facts like episodes in a screenplay, already carefully thought out before starting the camerawork. In other words, knowing already very well the subject I wanted to deal with. Having my precise, personal opinion, during the filming process I was certainly not objective, impersonal, like a reporter, but an author with a tale to tell, a story, a screenplay, an idea that I wanted to bring into existence. In order to do that, I was using the world as a stage, the crowds as extras, real-life characters as actors. For me, a documentary is a film to be narrated exactly like a conventional film, and as such, it must rely on a director's strong personality and profound preliminary preparation. It has the advantage of the immense fascination coming from contemporary events, of the truth of that which it shows. Documentary, therefore, conceived truly as a spectacle, to be projected in the first-run motion picture halls, with many, many people watching it.

This is the documentary.

* This text was written in 1966.



This page **Gualtiero Jacopetti at the 2003 Bradford Film Festival, speaking with the author Mark Goodall. Photos Jim Moran.**

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There are only two books on film that to my mind are absolutely essential reading. The first is *The Macmillan International Film Encyclopedia* edited by Ephraim Katz which is the ultimate reference tool: detailed, precise and written with immense clarity. The second is Amos Vogel's *Film as a Subversive Art*, a unique and brilliantly written text capturing the thrilling, visceral excitement of great cinema. In an age when the use of film as advertising rather than film as art has massively accelerated, Vogel's words are beautiful, inspiring and essential.

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Des Morts (Of the Dead)
1979 *Director* Jean-Pol Ferbus, Dominique Garny, Thierry Zéno *Editor* Thierry Zéno, Roland Grillon *Script/Commentary* n/c *Photography Music* Alain Pierre Availability: US DVD

Dolce e Selvaggio (Sweet and Savage)
1983 *Director* Antonio Climati, Mario Morra *Editor* Mario Morra *Script/Commentary* Antonio Climati, Mario Morra, Franco Prosperi *Photography* Antonio Climati *Music* Daniele Patucchi Currently unavailable

Donna nel Mondo, La (Women of the World)
1964 *Director* Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi, Paolo Cavara *Editor* Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi *Script/Commentary* Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi *Photography* Antonio Climati, Benito Frattari *Music* Riz Ortolani, Nino Oliviero Availability: US DVD

Faces of Death
1979 *Director* Conan LeCilaire (John Alan Schwartz) *Editor* James Roy, Henri Ivon Simoné, Lauri Cushman Script/Commentary Alan Black *Photography* Michael Golden, Dimetri Fermo *Music* Gene Kauer Availability: US/UK DVD

Magica Nuda (Mondo Magic)
1975 *Director* Alfredo & Angelo Castiglioni *Editor* Alfredo & Angelo Castiglioni *Script/Commentary* Guido Guerrasio, Alberto Moravia *Photography* Alfredo and Angelo Castiglioni *Music* Angelo Franceso Lavagnino Availability: US DVD

Malamondo
1964 *Director* Paolo Cavara *Editor* Paolo Cavara *Script/Commentary* Paolo Cavara, Ugo Gregoretti, Cesare Zanetti/ Guido Castaldo, Franco Torti, Stefano Strucchi *Photography* Ennio Guarnieri *Music* Ennio Morricone Currently unavailable

Mille Peccati...Nessuna Virtù (Wages of Sin)
1969 *Director* Sergio Martino *Editor* Eugenio

Alabiso *Script/Commentary* Luciano Martino *Photography* Floriano Trenker *Music* Peppino De Luca Currently unavailable

Mondo Freudo
1964 *Director* R L Frost *Editor* R L Frost *Script/Commentary* Bob Cresse *Photography* R L Frost *Music* The Duvals, Bill Wild, Chuck Morgan, Rodney Lee Bermingham Availability: US DVD

Mondo Candido
1975 *Director* Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi *Editor* Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi *Script/Commentary* Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi, Claudio Quarantotto *Photography* Giuseppe Ruzzolini *Music* Riz Ortolani Availability: US DVD

Mondo Cane
1963 *Director* Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi, Paolo Cavara *Editor* Gualtiero Jacopetti *Script/Commentary* Gualtiero Jacopetti, Franco Prosperi, Paolo Cavara *Photography* Antonio Climati, Benito Frattari *Music* Riz Ortolani, Nino Oliviero Availability: US DVD

Mondo Cane 2000 (This is America 3)
1988 *Director* Gabriele Crisanti *Editor* Cesare Bianchini *Script/Commentary* Luigi Mangini/ Nick Alexander *Photography* n/c *Music* Roberto Cimpanelli Currently unavailable

Mondo di Notte 3 (Ecco)
1963 *Director* Gianni Proia *Editor* Roberto Cinquini *Script/Commentary* Gianni Proia, Francesco Mazzei/ Ugo Liberatore, Francesco Mazzei *Photography* Gianni Narzisi, Baldo Schwarze *Music* Riz Ortolani Currently unavailable

Mondo di Notte Oggi
1975 *Director* Gianni Proia *Editor* Tito Presciutti *Script/Commentary* Oreste Lionello, Giancarlo Fusco *Photography* Benito Frattari, Claudio Ragona *Music* Gianni Oddi Currently unavailable

Mr. Mike's Mondo Video
1979 *Director* Michael O'Donoghue *Editor* Bob Tischler, Alan Miller *Script/Commentary* Mitchell Glazer, Michael O'Donoghue, Emily Prager, Dirk Wittenborn *Photography* Barry Rebo *Music* Sid Vicious, Root Boy Slim and the Sex Change Band, Julius LaRosa Currently unavailable

Nuova Guinea, L'Isola dei Cannibali (Guinea Ama)
1974 *Director* Akira Ide *Editor* Koichi Atsumi *Script/Commentary* Annibale Roccasecca, Sergio Fiorentini *Photography* Isamu Shimakura, Giancarlo Graziano, Shigeru Takana, Etsuo Akutsu *Music* Riz Ortolani, Corrado Demofonti Availability: German DVD

L'Occhio Selvaggio (The Wild Eye)
1967 *Director* Paolo Cavara *Editor* Sergio Montanari *Script* Paolo Cavara, Fabio Carpi, Ugo Pirro, Tonino Guerra, Alberto Moravia *Photography* Marcello Masiocchi *Music* Gianni Marchetti Currently unavailable

Pelo nel Mondo, Il (Go! Go! Go! World)
1964 *Director* Renato Marvi (Marco Vicario), Anthony M. Dawson (Antonio Margheretti *Editor* Marco Vicario *Script/Commentary* Marco Vicario *Photography* Giovanni Raffaldi, Giancarlo Lari, Marcello Gallinelli *Music* Nino Oliviero, Bruno Nicolai Currently unavailable

Realta' Romanzesca (Realities Around the World)
1967 *Director* Gianni Proia *Editor* Franco Arcalli *Script/Commentary* Gianni Proia, Giancarlo Fusco *Photography* Sante Achilli *Music* Riz Ortolani Availability: US videotape

Savana Violenta (This Violent World)
1976 *Director* Antonio Climati, Mario Morra *Editor* Mario Morra *Script/Commentary* Antonio Climati, Mario Morra *Photography* Antonio Climati *Music* Guido e Maurizio de Angelis Currently unavailable

Svezia: inferno e paradiso (Sweden Heaven and Hell)
1965 *Director* Luigi Scattini *Editor* Luigi Scattini *Script/Commentary* Luigi Scattini, Lucio Marcuzzo *Photography* Claudio Racca *Music* Piero Umiliani Currently unavailable

Ultime Grida dalla Savana (Savage Man, Savage Beast)
1974 *Director* Antonio Climati, Mario Morra *Editor* Mario Morra *Script/Commentary* Antonio Climati, Mario Morra, Alberto Moravia *Photography* Antonio Climati *Music* Carlo Savina Currently unavailable

Note: Most 'currently unavailable' titles can be located via specialist online outlets. Contact the author via the publisher for further details.

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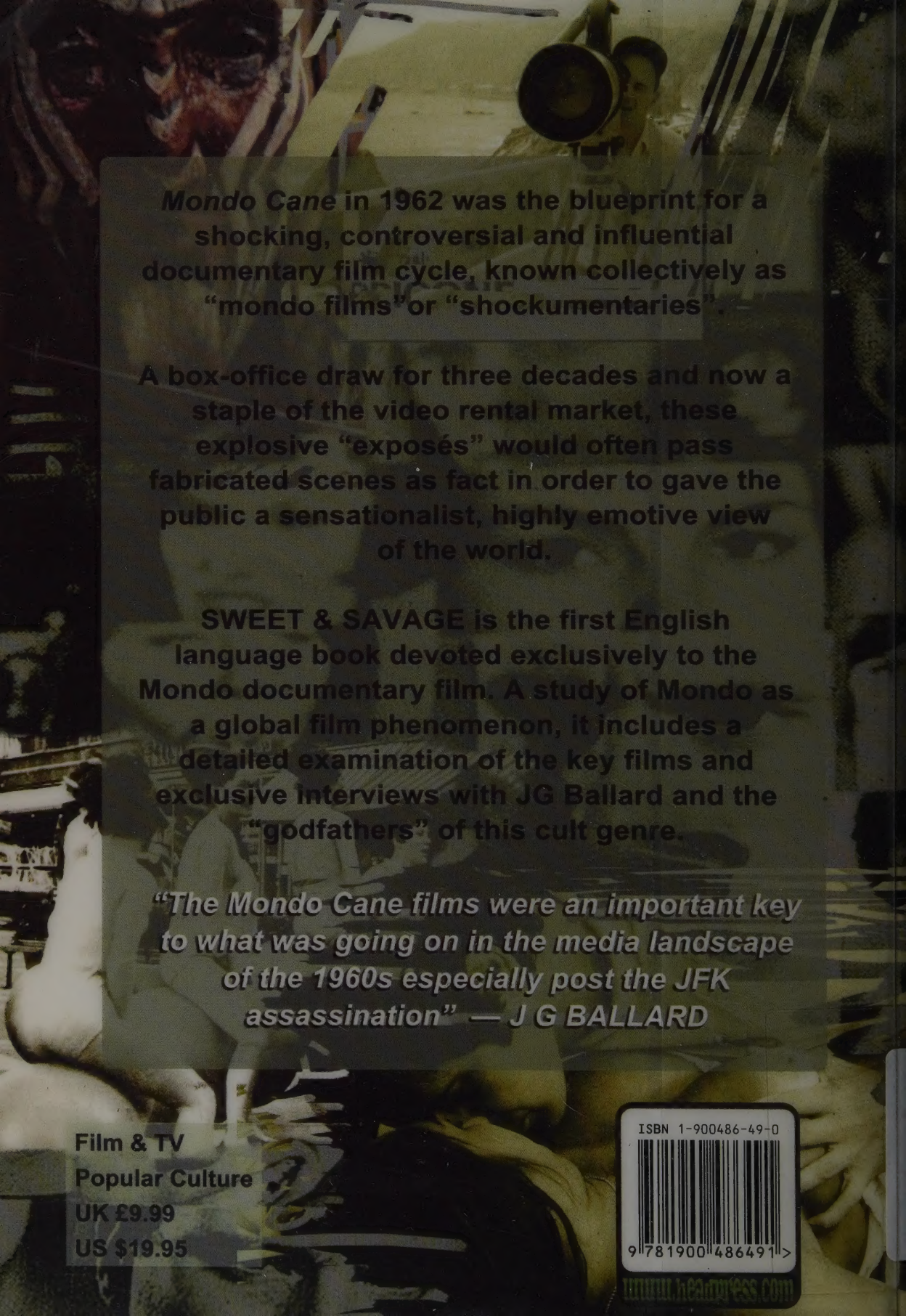

Mondo Cane in 1962 was the blueprint for a shocking, controversial and influential documentary film cycle, known collectively as "mondo films"or "shockumentaries".

A box-office draw for three decades and now a staple of the video rental market, these explosive "exposés" would often pass fabricated scenes as fact in order to gave the public a sensationalist, highly emotive view of the world.

SWEET & SAVAGE is the first English language book devoted exclusively to the Mondo documentary film. A study of Mondo as a global film phenomenon, it includes a detailed examination of the key films and exclusive interviews with JG Ballard and the "godfathers" of this cult genre.

"The Mondo Cane films were an important key to what was going on in the media landscape of the 1960s especially post the JFK assassination" — J G BALLARD

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